

The Passion play [at Oberammerg...

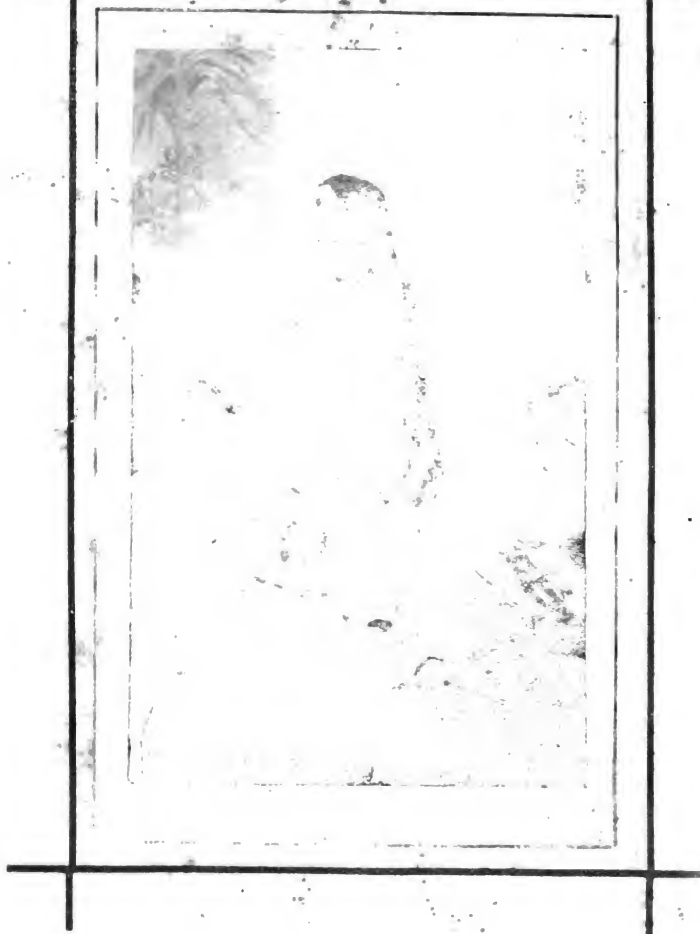
William Watkins
Old



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The Passion Play.



THE
PASSION PLAY,

BY

WILLIAM WATKINS OLD.



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TO
H. G.,
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED,
IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE OF MANY
YEARS OF CONSTANT FRIENDSHIP.





PREFACE.

“ IF ever there were sights and sounds to ‘make deep silence in the heart for thought to do her part,’ they are the visions and voices which, throughout all their after-life, must surely haunt the memory of those who have witnessed the *Passions Spiel* at Ober Ammergau.” Such is the judgment of an able critic; and the following pages will, I think, be found to support the truth of his assertion and to afford fresh evidence of the

profound impression which this remarkable spectacle has produced upon all who have had the privilege of beholding it.

There is little probability of so interesting a performance of the Passion Play at Ober Ammergau as that of last year ever again occurring. The changes which education and increased means of locomotion are rapidly introducing throughout the district, will inevitably destroy that artlessness and child-like confidence which gave the main charm to this representation. In another decade (should the Play be again allowed) the players will have changed. Already, I am told, they are more theatrical than in former years, and are losing that provincial accent which is most appropriate for the

representatives of the poor fishermen of the sea of Tiberias. In future there might be more intelligent acting, but infinitely less life in the Play. A variety of incidents also added to the interest of this occasion. The English press had called universal attention to the subject, and lent it a fresh importance in the eyes of the world. The atmospheric conditions were more than once peculiarly favourable in adding great solemnity to the show. Even the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales gave a special *prestige* to the spectacle: at all events, to Englishmen, accustomed as we are to respond to the pleasures as well as the sorrows of our own well beloved royal family. Again, the performer who took the leading character, was

so singularly gifted by nature for his part, that the chances are a hundred to one against the recurrence of so remarkable a likeness added to such innate nobility of manner. In the village church last year could be seen the Christus-elect for 1880, devoutly leading the choir in the service of the Litany. In the village churchyard could be seen the new-made grave of the Christus of 1840, who was accidentally killed by the falling of a tree during the summer. But, above all, the circumstances of the time threw a quite peculiar importance over the gathering. A terrible war had suddenly stopped the spectacle in 1870; and, for many months, dreadful uncertainty must have hung over the actors as to who amongst

them might be spared to carry out the suspended representation. The having passed through so serious an ordeal could not but invest these peasant-players with a certain solemnity, as of dedication, specially in keeping with the sacred nature of their drama : and one can well imagine that their having faced death upon the battle-field, their having wept and prayed for the absent or the slain, their having taken part in the grand triumph of their Fatherland, not only glorified them in the eyes of their audience, but lent them deeper insight and fuller experience for the fit accomplishment of their hereditary task.

Originally written for the pages of a local newspaper,* the greater part of the following

* The *Hereford Journal*.

narrative has already appeared in print. The kind reception it met with emboldens me to re-publish it under the present form. My thanks are greatly due to the Rev. Malcolm MacColl, whose admirable guide-book I found of the utmost use on the spot, and of much service afterwards. I have also to acknowledge the help I have derived from Mr. Blackburn's artistic volume, "Art in the Mountains," and from the writings of many other authors, in newspapers and magazines, of whose opinions and observations I have made use.



The Passion Play.

CHAPTER I.

WE crossed the channel from Harwich to Antwerp one Saturday night in July, myself, Captain Grahame, his brother Theodore, and the Hon. Atholl Harrington. Curiosity drew us to take this route. We had tried almost every other. We ran down from London by the mid-day train so as to spend a few quiet hours by the sea-side. The railway line is uninteresting. Harwich, which lies just beyond Colchester, is a stupid little town, which we "did" in about

ten minutes. It is situated upon the estuary of the Stour, and commands some pretty views. A breadth of crisp grey sea spreads in front. On one side is an esplanade, furnished with bathing-machines ; on the opposite shore is Landguard Fort. There is plenty of room to walk in the streets, and an abundant supply of the freshest of fresh air. That is all. On the quay there is a first-class hotel, where we dined before going on board the packet. These Harwich boats are commodious and well managed, and I have rarely made a more comfortable voyage.

" Yes," said Grahame, when I made the above remark in the morning ; " but I must protest I think a law might be passed to prevent restless travellers from tramping up and down deck, overhead, between the hours of twelve and two."

" And I would suggest an amendment," added Harrington, " that such passengers, moreover, as will persist in poisoning themselves before they embark, when there is scarcely a capfull of wind, should be instantly consigned

to the hold, whence they could be fished out at the end of the voyage, without incommoding other people."

"I only wish I felt well enough to second you," Theodore Grahame observed, in a faint voice.

We were bound for the village of Ober Ammergau, in Bavaria, there to witness the performance of the celebrated decennial Passion Play which was occupying the notice of the public at home and abroad. We had heard and read of these peasant players who were said to rivet the attention of their audience, whether native or foreign, learned or unlearned, frivolous or serious, alike; and the lavish encomiums of the press, as well as the report of private friends, had awakened a desire in us to prove for ourselves what was so unaccountably fascinating.

Regarding the matter from a religious point of view, we probably all imagined it must be shocking and profane; looking at it simply as an artistic exhibition, that it must be second-rate and vulgar; treating it as a matter of common

sense, that such old-world mummeries must be altogether obsolete and unnecessary : still, we were attracted to see for ourselves, and the result richly repaid us for the experiment.

I do not know why a personal representation of Sacred History, even when involving the most vital mysteries, should strike one as being more irreverent than its representation by means of design or description. Nevertheless, it is an undoubted fact, that an almost universal impression exists in England that such is the case ; and, while a poem or a picture of the Crucifixion would be examined with delight by people of the strictest piety and the most tender conscience, its similitude by living actors is regarded with a shudder, even by the most thoughtless of common society. Histrionic representation must necessarily be far more vivid than any painting or literary composition ; and, thus appealing more powerfully to our emotions, one would think, would be rather welcomed as an exponent of spiritual truths. Our general experience, however, decides otherwise. The prejudice may spring from

unfamiliarity, but it seems to be indigenous to our country, or rather to our age. I must, myself, confess to have felt it strongly ; and it is the more remarkable how instantly it died out in the atmosphere of reverence and earnest reality, which filled, and as it were, consecrated, the theatre at Ober Ammergau.

The artistic difficulties were, perhaps, not so easily surmounted. Many improvements have been suggested, and much might undoubtedly be done to lend greater finish and effect to certain scenes ; but, taken as a whole, the performance was simply unparalleled for beauty and completeness, and though it might, perhaps, be bettered, it would be merely in minor details. There was nothing that could offend the most cultured taste, nor was there a single actor or scene that could be pronounced unfit. Where there were incongruities, as in the age of the girl who bore the part of the mother of Jesus, they were no more than continually occur on the stage, and were redeemed by extraordinary conscientiousness of acting and by a simplicity that bore the impress of nature.

Objections have been raised to the minute realism which introduces pigeons that fly away when the traffickers are driven from the temple, which shows the actual blood trickling down the neck and breast of the Saviour, as he thrills with pain when the Crown of Thorns is forced over his brow ; which gives the crowing of the cock after the denial of Peter ; which allows the crash to be heard behind the scenes that announces the awful end of Judas. But it was its intense reality that appeared to me to be the one great charm of the Passion Play. Everything was so naturally done, that one accepted it as fact, nor was place left to criticise it as Art.

But the greatest surprise to me, was the intensely modern interest that pervaded this relic of a bygone age. The pageant may have been composed to amuse and instruct the ignorant nobles and the degraded serfs of the middle ages, but the charm of its genius was contemporary with ourselves : in most respects it carried one back to a primitive Christian epoch, and an apostolic atmosphere seemed

to surround it, nevertheless, we felt the history was our own, and the story of Christ's passion was of direct moment to our daily life. The performance was old-world and unfamiliar beyond precedent, yet it carried with it all the clearness and conviction of present events. The universal paramount importance of the subject, as well as the utter self-abnegation and devotedness of the players, invested it with a charm which no other tragedy, ancient or modern, has ever approached, and won for it an almost unanimous verdict of approval.

"It must really be very curious," I said, "since everyone condemns it before seeing, and acquits it after."

"I can never think it otherwise than a profanation," replied Grahame, "and I have serious doubts whether we are right in going."

"I beg your pardon," observed Theodore, in a judicial tone; "everybody tells me it is a quite proper thing to do this season. I should just as soon have missed seeing the Academy Exhibition, as miss seeing the Passion Play."

“ I have neither seen the one nor the other,” remarked Harrington, lighting a cigar, “ and am indifferent to both. One must go somewhere ; and why not there, as well as anywhere else ? ”

So, we chatted on, as the steamboat ploughed its steady way up the glittering channel of the Scheldt in the early morning. The deck was crowded with passengers—Alpine tourists, with shining axe and strong staff, eager for the ascent of frozen peaks, and slippery precipices ; school-children with the hope of home upon their happy faces ; stout commercial travellers, and lean governesses ; foreign grandees in fur-lined coats ; and English ladies as fresh as newly gathered roses—one after another they emerged, groping their way up from below, to watch the rising sun, and to gaze with curious eyes upon the quaint roofs and towers of the towns that appeared here and there along the shores—low level shores, studded with lines of serried trees, and dotted with windmills of foreign and unfamiliar aspect.

Having to wait at Antwerp for the train, we looked into the Cathedral, where an elaborate service was going forward. It was much as usual. A herd of English and Americans were roaming about the aisles, staring at the pictures and the people. The congregation repaid their observation with interest, I may say compound interest, and seemed pretty generally engaged in carrying chairs from one point to another, stopping meanwhile to cross themselves as occasion required. Of course, I only speak of what I saw. I have no doubt there were many very devout persons present, and the service was, I trust, beneficial to those who took part in it. My remarks are merely those of a casual observer, and are confined to externals. In this respect, I fancy I have seen something of the sort in a picture of a Buddhist temple in India. Three priests, in gorgeous robes, and a lot of picturesque attendants courtesying in front of an altar, which at a distance resembles a juggler's table, with gilt paraphernalia, and flowers, and numerous lights : clouds of white vapour thrown up during an incantation : a bell ringing inter-

mittently, as though a performing elephant were part of the show : three or four unwholesome-looking boys wearing scarlet tippets, and swinging censers towards the hierarch. Which is it? Heathen or Christian? Benares or Antwerp? I cannot tell. But I don't fancy they spit upon the floor at Benares, and, at one place, I can aver, the pavements are beastly owing to this objectionable practice. It was certainly at Antwerp that, upon leaving the sacred edifice, the first thing which caught my eye was a party of urchins gambling with cards upon the footway.

“O tempora! O mores!” I exclaimed.

“Where are the police?” said Grahame.

Theodore made a gesture of despair; while Harrington watched the gamesters, and offered to take any odds on the hand “of the little devil with red hair.”

In the afternoon we attended the church of St. Gudule, in Brussels, famous for its enormous pulpit (carved by Verbruggen) and superb windows. In general, stained glass too much resembles a supernatural Turkey carpet. One

is dazzled and offended by the predominant reds and blues, and annoyed by the spotty mosaic work. Here the windows are a series of elegant pictures, gleaming with silver and sapphire lights, and uniting the most refined colouring with classic design. The service was a grand solemnity, with beautiful chanting by the choir.

Brussels itself is a charming little city ; but, I must confess, I am always anxious to get out of Belgium. The people seem to me to combine the lower characteristics of the French and Dutch, but not to be so agreeable as either.

It is said to be a very cheap place to live in ; but I only know my Brussels hotel bills are always higher than elsewhere. It may be want of taste upon my part which prevents a just appreciation of Belgium, for I am likewise unable to go into raptures over the paintings of Rubens ; which, you will say, speaks for itself. To me, Brussels is a kind of apotheosis of Boulogne, without the sea (which is the best part of Boulogne), with second-rate Parisian toilettes and a second-hand tongue ; while, in

my opinion, Peter Paul Rubens might have spared the feelings of posterity by not exposing such a load of stout women, especially as they are so very plain and foxy. I can admit that the celebrated pictures in Antwerp Cathedral were once exceptionally splendid ; but I fancy they have been tampered with, and they seemed to me to be dusty and darkened.

One night at Cologne. We staid at the Belle Vue Hotel, and my bedroom window commanded a magnificent view of the city, with its dark spires and gables beside the rushing waters of the moonlit river. It looked preternaturally picturesque, like a scene in a theatre. Hundreds of twinkling lights amongst the blue shadowy bridges and streets. I left my window open, and about four o'clock was awakened by the further theatrical effect of rolling thunder. The tempest lay towards the Siebengebirge, and a pall of cloud was half drawn over the city. A violent wind was blowing up the stream, and soon the rain came down in sheets, while the lightning danced like golden beads in the sky. I was kept awake a couple of hours

by the tumult of the storm and the sound of church bells going for early service.

Two days we spent on board the steamboats of the "exulting and abounding" Rhine. We could have done it in a quarter the time by rail, but I cannot bear to hurry through fine scenery: it seems a species of ingratitude; and, to me, the Rhine, however hackneyed, is "a joy for ever." The weather was showery with bright sunshine between-whiles, and the prospects were more than ordinarily clear and beautiful. As usual, we fell in with very nice company, and the days fled by as in Elysium.

"Give me Longfellow's 'Hyperion' and Bulwer's 'Pilgrims' and a comfortable seat on board one of these boats," said Theodore, "and I could be happy for—for half-an-hour."

"The river Wye is, I believe, very like the Rhine," observed Grahame, enquiringly.

"Yes, much the same as sixpence is like half-a-crown," was my answer.

"That is a very pretty girl, the one in blue, you were speaking to just now," said Harrington, "and I had rather look at her

than all the castles in the world." And no doubt he was right.

The long railway-journey from Mayence to Munich was a very fatiguing one. We started about nine o'clock at night, and I slept till three, when I woke to find we were passing through a wild forest-land, with an immense tract of barren country on our left. The military precision of the salute given by the station-men to the passing trains amused me. They stood like wooden dolls, with one finger touching the side of their cap, and never stirred a hair. In England there would have been a wink or a cheery word given to the stokers as the train moved by in the chilly dawn. Here, duty would allow of no greeting, nor even the semblance of humanity. The guards of the train were dull, morose men, who demanded to see our tickets more than once in the night, but never evinced the slightest approach to civility, or showed that they took the most remote interest in the welfare of their passengers. I should say, morally speaking, they were well drilled servants, but only half-developed men

About Pappenstein we passed along a picturesque, but sterile valley, for some miles, with a town or two in prospect, and ruined castles, and a river, and quaint rocks that resembled walls and towers hoary with age. Then the road lay through interminable corn-fields, across a vast plain, with little variation, up to the gates of Munich.

To those who are fond of art, Munich is a treasure-house. It is specially a city of fresco paintings. The churches, gates, palaces, galleries, even the houses, are thus adorned; and the effect is sumptuous and regal. The architecture of the city is likewise magnificent, and suggests festivity and state. I suppose the galleries are some of the finest in Europe. The royal palaces are splendid; the churches various and superb. The stately streets are clean and well ordered, and there is a general air of prosperity and decorum about the place. In the Glyptothek or Sculpture Gallery, is the famous ancient statue of the sleeping Faun. It is an ungraceful figure, or rather, I should say, it is a figure in an ungraceful attitude.

Its execution as a work of art is admirable. The collection of sculpture is neither very large nor superlatively fine, but owing to tasteful arrangement the pieces are seen to the greatest advantage. The halls themselves are superbly decorated in fresco, and every effect of colour and position is employed to enhance the beauty of their contents. The ancient and modern picture galleries of the Pinacothek are wonderfully fine ; especially the former, in which we meet with the world-famed beggar boys of Murillo, some matchless portraits by Vandyke, and *chefs-d'oeuvre* by Rubens and other great masters.

It was here we were spending the second morning after our arrival in Munich. It was very warm ; and sight-seeing is the fatigue of fatigue. We gave up going farther, and laid ourselves down on a great velvet settee in one of the saloons, and chatted about the season in town and our mutual acquaintance, the same as if we had been in a London club-house.

“ It is really too bad,” I remonstrated, “ in

this palace of art to fall back upon the gossip of Belgravia. What curious people we English are! We carry ourselves with us wherever we go. Harrington asked for pale ale at lunch yesterday ; and, I really believe, were you, Grahame, to be cast upon the planet Saturn, you would enquire of the first person you met whether he had been shooting at Hurlingham this season, and if he knew Sabretash of the 4th."

"I have made a discovery," broke in Grahame, "and that is, that this is a much pleasanter place for a lounge than the smoking-room at the Carlton."

"And I also have made a discovery," added Harrington, "and that is, that a satirical friend of ours never speaks without using the word 'really,' and that he is always discovering something *curious* either among the pictures or in ourselves."

"There is ample scope for his observation among the paintings," said Theodore, "without touching ourselves. I find some of them very shocking."

Our hotel, the Hotel de Baviere, was large enough to be fatiguing as well as handsome, and too large to be well managed. My first day there was wasted, owing to the servants mislaying my portmanteau on our arrival, which put me to much inconvenience and expense. No one seemed to be responsible. At the bureau I was referred to the concierge, from the concierge to the bureau ; and they all appeared to think a great deal of the trouble I caused them, but nothing of the trouble they caused me. At length, about five in the afternoon, by dint of my insisting on going to the police station to report the matter, a man was despatched to hunt up the portmanteau, which was soon brought back from a lady's house where it had been left in the morning. It appears it had been carried up to my room, and then brought down again and thrown back in mistake upon the omnibus. Not a syllable of apology or regret was offered me for this combination of gross carelessness and neglect. I suppose such mistakes are of frequent occurrence at the Hotel de Baviere, as they treated it quite as a matter of course.

The *salle à manger* was a square gloomy chamber, only remarkable for a monstrous chandelier, out of proportion with everything else in the room. The *table d'hôte* was excellent, and elicited Harrington's praise.

"I am a growing lad," he explained, "and I require an immense deal of sustenance. What comes next? Just hand me the *menu*.—So!" This was Harrington's pet word in German, which, in his limited knowledge of that language, did duty for everything. "So," he repeated, "Noix de veau demi grasse a la puree de concombres—Turban de volaille à la Perigord. I say, Grahame, I think we should do wisely to stay on here in Munich, instead of bothering about that stupid Passion Play business."

"Harrington, Harrington," said Theodore, sedately, "I fear your God is your belly."

After dinner we went for a drive in the English Garden, a well wooded park with ornamental water, and temples and chalets erected here and there. We then spent the evening at a café, where there was a passable band, and no end of company sitting about

under the chestnut trees in the open air. The next evening we drove to see the celebrated bronze statue of Bavaria in the Theresien Wiese. It is a colossal but withal graceful female figure standing beside a lion, and holding a wreath in her upraised hand. The statue with its pedestal is over a hundred feet in height. It stands in front of a Grecian building called the Hall of Heroes, and is justly regarded as a masterpiece of modern art. It is ascended by a spiral staircase within, and there is room for eight persons to sit round inside the head, from which fine views of Munich and the surrounding country can be seen. Another wonder of Munich is the Basilica in the Carlstrasse, an exquisite specimen of Byzantine architecture, sumptuous with marble pillars and gilded cornices, and lined with frescoes, which are considered the finest in the world of modern production.

We were tired when we went to bed on Friday night, for we had done all our packing, and we were to start the next morning for Ober Ammergau.



CHAPTER II.

FIVE in the morning is rather an early hour, but one never gets up at that time in summer without moralizing on the folly of remaining later in bed. We had to turn out at five on Saturday morning in order to start for Ober Ammergau ; and, as a matter of course, we one and all declared it was most enjoyable, made a feeble breakfast, surreptitiously pocketed rolls for after-consumption, and, in the strength of virtue, shook the dust from our feet as we departed from the Hotel de Baviere.

The journey by rail as far as Weilheim is uninteresting except along the shore of the Starnberg lake, whence the Tyrolese Alps are visible—a line of jagged grey mountains, peering through the morning mist, and streaked with snow.

At Weilheim a hundred carriages were in waiting, and, after a few minutes' confusion amongst the crowd of passengers disgorged by the train, we discovered our own (for which we had telegraphed the day before), and, having packed ourselves and luggage in, we rattled away through the village. Conveyances were much dearer than they had been, even in 1870. The enormous influx of foreign visitors had raised the market. For ours, which was certainly the best of the lot, with a pair of fine horses, we paid £2, and it was considered very cheap. I am told that in 1860 the carriage would have cost only sixteen or eighteen shillings. Weilheim is a straggling village, with whitewashed wooden houses and pretty gardens, in each of which I noticed a funny little sparrow-cot, about the size of a lantern, upon the top of a pole. The people were all at their doors and windows to watch the carriages dashing by. There was nothing very distinctive in their costume or appearance. Our driver was a respectable-looking and rather handsome man, who had a word for everybody

on the road. We could not carry on much conversation with him, but he talked a deal over his shoulder to us, and pointed out whatever there was to be seen on the road.

"If you will allow me, I think I should like to change seats," observed Theodore, who had his back to the horses. "This man makes me nervous jabbering over my head, and I fancy he seems to be getting angry."

"What could put such a notion into your brain?" said his brother, the captain, very good-naturedly yielding up his place beside me.

"The better back to that side of the carriage," suggested Harrington.

"Partly so, but not entirely," acquiesced Theodore. "It is decidedly more comfortable. But, to speak frankly, I did not quite like the butt-end of that fellow's whip, and he keeps on saying *Yer a diener*. Now that does not sound civil, and I suspect it is very bad language."

"*Ihr diener*," I explained, "simply means your servant. Are you reassured now?"

"Yes, I must take your word for it; but I think I will remain where I am."

As far as Murnau our track was somewhat tame, lying principally through pasture-lands, with distant glimpses of the Alps. It was nevertheless very charming, and nothing could have been more delightful than the delicious breeze and the brilliant sunshine with which we were favoured. Our puggeries and Sonnenschirme were found most useful, especially in walking up the hills, where we gathered spikes of purple salvia and bunches of myosotis to wear in our hats. At Murnau our driver recommended us to stop at a small inn near the entrance of the town instead of going to the Post. It was a poor place. But I don't know that we should have done better elsewhere. German living is not, as a rule, agreeable to English taste; and, in a small provincial town, even in England, it would be rash to count upon a good dinner. Our meal consisted of dishwater soup, the driest of veal cutlets, and something that was named rindfleisch, but suggested old woman. I, being spokesman, had to bear the abuse of the whole party for ordering such stuff, in addition to the punishment of partaking of it.

I wandered through the town. It was market-day, but I could see nothing worth buying except some apricots and cherries, which, with sweet biscuits, formed our dessert. The young people of this district seemed to adopt no special costume, but I remarked several elderly women with laced bodices, and singular conical caps of sealskin on their heads ; while the men affected broad beaver hats with coloured feathers set at the side, and their waistcoats were plated with bright buttons.

Upon leaving Murnau we approached the mountains, and the views on every side became very striking. The Wetterstein and the cold top of the Zugspitze rose before us as we descended a steep hill. We then drove along a well-kept level road, through a wide marsh, enamelled gaily with a thousand flowers. A colossal rampart of limestone cliffs shut us in towards the left, with here and there a drift of snow lingering low down in its rifts and crevices, and here and there a waterfall. Soon we entered between the heights, skirting a babbling trout stream, the Loisack, whose banks were

blue with forget-me-nots; and, presently, we reached Oberau, where we rested and took coffee, while the horses were fed on junks of brown bread.

Leaving the carriage to follow, we walked across the meadows by a short cut, regaining the road at the foot of an excessively steep hill, which we had to ascend. Extra horses, "vorspann," for which there is extra charge, are required to pull the carriage up this precipitous ascent.

"I feel as light-hearted as a child," cried Grahame, striding up the hill, and humming snatches of song. "There is nothing like mountain air for the health and spirits."

"True," I replied. "Ruskin was right when he wrote 'The spirit of the hills is action as that of the lowlands is repose'; and here, I suppose, we are under the domination of the Zugspitze. Do but look back. How magnificent is that peak, towering above the sunlit woods! The very sight of its snowy pinnacle is a tonic, independent of this refreshing, wine-like atmosphere."

"If there is one thing I hate more than going up hill," said Harrington, "it is to hear you two fellows talking such bosh."

"They are like parrots," agreed Theodore, who was already dreadfully out of breath, "and I say, Harrington, I'll just take your arm, and we will walk more slowly together."

Through a thickly-wooded gorge, beside the road, a mountain torrent rushed downwards, bursting over the rocks in a hundred cascades, enlivening our way with twinkling lights and leaping fountains and ceaseless music. Masses of delicate oak-fern grew in profusion amongst the underwood, and the crimson blossoms of the Alpine azalea greeted us for the first time—the mountain rose, as it is commonly called, though it is no rose at all. Clustering orchids, a pretty campion, and the frothy sprays of the greater spirea sprang up amid innumerable lesser flowers. To a botanist the district would be full of interest; nor less so to the entomologist. I observed several strange varieties of beetle, two species of dragon fly, and moths and butterflies by the score.

Just in front of us two men and a woman toiled up the ascent, beside their little cart. They were peasants from the neighbourhood, as I understood, of the Walchen See, and were in picturesque costumes. The woman wore a full linen habit-shirt plaited up to the throat, with long sleeves to her wrist, and over that an open bodice of dark blue cloth thickly embroidered with silver; a handsome silver necklace, and great pins of the same metal in her thick braided hair; a dark cloth skirt; good shoes and stockings; and a broad felt hat looped with a heavy cord and tassels. She must once have been a very handsome girl. Even now, when over forty, her features were regular, the teeth magnificent, and the complexion of a clear brown and red. There was, moreover, a sensible and good-humoured expression on her face that served as an introduction, and we chatted all the way to the top. The men wore breeches and woollen leggings; jackets of grey cloth faced with green, and conspicuous waistcoats adorned with rows of silver buttons as big as florins. The

younger was a handsome fellow and quite a swell, with a magnificent plume in his Tyrolese hat, and a lot of bear's teeth and other fancy articles hung at his waistbelt. They were bound, like ourselves, for the Passions Spiel.

On the brow of the hill were two or three blind or crippled beggars, one of whom sat by the wayside playing on an accordin. As a rule the districts we passed through were very free from mendicancy, and the poorest people looked tidy and respectable.

Grahame and myself waited for our companions under a huge beech-tree, where someone has been good enough to erect a seat. They came up one after another.

"Are you anything of a naturalist?" I called out to Harrington, holding up a chrysalis I had found upon the bark of a tree.

"I don't go in for stinks," was the rejoinder.

"Pray inform us, Harrington," said Grahame, "what may be the interpretation of that rather unsavoury term."

"We always call natural science 'stinks,' at Oxford."

"I am afraid the language of Oxford is slang," I observed, laughing.

"And the manners of Oxford will shortly become those of the stable and the servant's hall," added Theodore, who had just come upon the scene very much put out with having had to walk the last quarter of a mile by himself.

We strolled on, and at the top of the hill stopped for our carriage, which soon joined us. To give an idea of the steepness of the hill, there was a notice close by where two drags should be put on in descending, as without special precaution the most frightful accidents would happen. Just beyond, we passed the ancient Benedictine monastery of Ettal, now a brewery, with a fine church attached. As we drove along we were constantly overtaking foot passengers, all bound upon the same errand as ourselves,—carefully got-up Anglican curates, in the straitest of waistcoats, with knapsack and alpenstock to boot; bronzed peasants from the neighbouring valleys; Americans who bore their nationality upon their beards; comfortable German burghers trudging

along with their coats thrown across their arms and their hats in hand.

A steep cliff was on our right, and high up in it we could perceive a cavern with a Calvary inside. Directly opposite, upon our left, the Kofel, bathed in golden sunshine, towered above the surrounding peaks ; and, on its summit, a light iron Cross stood out against the azure sky. Before us lay the village. And so, greeted on either side by emblems of our Saviour's Passion, we entered Ober Ammergau.

Our carriage rolled through the busy street, already in a ferment with visitors, and drew up at the shop of Madame Georg Lang. Madame Lang is the factotum of the village. Her establishment was crowded with company. People were supplying themselves with carvings in wood and ivory (for which the place is specially famous) toys, photographs, China ornaments, *que voulez vous*, and were instituting a thousand enquiries about the morrow's performance. Having, at last, obtained an audience and introduced ourselves, we found everything had been arranged for us with the

utmost intelligence and precision. My letter, written three weeks before, was filed close at hand ; my name was inscribed upon a list. With admirable despatch, and at the same time with the deepest courtesy, our tickets were quickly handed to us, a servant sent to guide us to our lodgings, and Madame Lang, with a gracious smile, turned from us to attend upon another party with the same civilities. What that little woman must go through on the days preceding the Play, one would think would be enough to spoil the temper of Moses and to tax the strength of a Samson. To reply to innumerable enquiries, made in all kinds of languages, including pantomime ; to attend to an abnormal influx of greedy customers ; to pay or receive money every instant ; to be in every place at once ; and to do it with coolness, good nature, and exactitude—you will agree with me, it requires a Madame Georg Lang to do all this, and to do it all well.

The village is very scattered, and the road we followed wound in and out, crossing and recrossing a brook, and passing groups of

cottages which appeared all alike, with little gardens beside them, and a pump and a long horse-trough in front. We turned up a green lane, with similar houses bordering it, which seemed to lead into a farm-yard. A strange-looking young man, with long brown hair hanging over his shoulders, came on down the footpath. He was tall and lithe, but he had rather a slouching gait, and I thought there was something sinister in the furtive glance of his dark eyes. He had a restless manner, tossing his head from time to time to shake back his untidy locks. Yet the countenance was handsome, and there was something in his appearance that denoted the consciousness of attracting attention.

"*Das ist Joseph Mair,*" whispered the driver to me, as I was riding on the box, and I then recognized the principal actor in the Passion Play. In another instant he had entered a cottage-door, and we had drawn up at our own abiding place.

It was a curious place, half farmstead, half dwelling-house. On one side of the passage I

could perceive stabling and fowl-houses, on the other a well-furnished parlour, with a spacious kitchen at the back. An old woman came out and welcomed us, and called her husband and daughter and a stout servant-wench to help in carrying our baggage upstairs. Our apartments were large and clean, but were sadly infested with fleas, which I expect came from the poultry below. The chairs, tables, and wardrobes, of walnut wood, were of heavy make, but superior to what would be met with in a similar household in England. Scriptural paintings hung upon the whitewashed walls. They were of a gloomy character, but not altogether inartistic. A great eiderdown pillow covered the bed. Mirrors and vases of flowers decorated the chambers, and there was a small dressing-table with very limited washing apparatus in each.

I went and opened my casement, which looked out upon a strip of flower-garden, divided by railings from a plot of open ground, with cottages at the farther end. As I did so a great uproar arose, and piercing shrieks

were heard below. I looked out and saw women and children flying in every direction ; and then, round the corner, came a carriage with runaway horses, full gallop, and the romantic figure of Joseph Mair clinging to their heads. I expected every instant he would be down under their hoofs ; and, if so, the Passion Play would have ever remained a sealed mystery to us. With considerable courage he held on, dragging round the square towards a haystack, into which the horses plunged, and snapped off the pole of the carriage. Some other men at the moment rushed forward to the rescue, and the animals were mastered between them. Joseph Mair showed himself as modest as he had proved himself brave. To the crowd of people who now hurried up he gave a word of assurance that he had merely sprained his finger, and was not otherwise hurt, and he then retreated into his cottage, leaving the rest to attend to the broken carriage. I began to think him better looking than I had judged at first-sight. The face, when lighted up with the excitement

of running, was full of beauty, and there was dignity in the form and action, even when racing along beside the restive horses, which I could not but admire. I had already ascertained that the silly reports which appeared in some of the English papers respecting him were without foundation. He was *not* in any German regiment during the war with France. He was *not* imprisoned for getting drunk and for insubordination. Had he been drafted into the army his hair must have been cut off, and he would have been rendered unfit for his part. He had, therefore, a special dispensation from serving. He is described by those who know him as "modest, gentle, and deeply devotional," and his character in the village is most respectable. When Mr. MacColl (the author of "The Ober Ammergau Passion Play") asked him, after the performance, whether he did not feel much fatigued from his physical and moral exertion during the day, he replied quickly and modestly—"Ah, but the honour of it!" Indeed, the whole of the performers are said to be men

of high character and thorough respectability, though, of course, of lowly station.

"Where can I get water for my bath?" shouted Grahame from his room.

"Would you mind asking the old lady down stairs whether she has a small file or a pair of nail-scissors she could oblige me with," said Theodore, peeping in at my door. "It is so tiresome, I find I have left mine behind."

While Harrington bawled out from below—"I say, if you fellows are so long dressing, up there, I shall go on."

Harrington did go on; and when we got to the Post-Haus we found a good supply of *hammel* cutlets, and the remains of a roast goose, which he had procured, I believe, by means of the magic monosyllable *So*. Ample justice did we to this supper, washing down our meats with great glass tankards of Vienna beer. The accommodation was rough, and the house noisy and untidy; but we were hungry, and ignored our surroundings. The worst thing I liked was the bread, which was brownish and filled with caraways or coriander

seed. There was another public-house, close by, which we looked in at, but found it inferior to the Post. Every place was swarming with visitors, eating, drinking, and making enquiries respecting accommodation. We soon met with acquaintance in the streets. Harrington fell in with a college chum ; the Grahames ran up against some people they knew, from St. Mariners-on-shore ; and I had a most delightful chat with my fair friend in the blue dress, who had just arrived from Innsbruck with her party. Then we strolled off down to the theatre, and examined the construction of this remarkable building.

It stood just outside the village and was a very rough and simple erection of deal boards, made on the model of an old Greek theatre. The seats of the Auditorium shelved upward in tiers, and varied according to class. A very large proportion were simple benches open to the sky. Divided from these by a partition were rows of chairs, numbered and protected from sun and rain by a wooden roof and a velarium in front. For these seats you paid five shillings.

The others of course were even less. The stage itself was 118 feet broad, and was composed of common deal boarding slightly nailed together. This was all open to the sky, and ran back to a depth of 170 feet. At the sides were painted wings which led off the stage, and through them the chorus always entered and retired. About fifty feet back from the orchestra a scenic structure ran across the entire width of the stage, consisting of the theatre proper (where the *tableaux vivants* and most of the acting took place), and, on either hand, an open street leading to the back. Two houses with balconies abutted upon the right and left of the theatre proper, one of which was called the house of Annas, and the other the house of Pilate; and several scenes of the play took place in the balconies of these houses. The drop scene was painted with a view of Jerusalem; and on the gable above were the figures of Faith, Hope, and Charity pictured on an azure ground spangled with stars; while above all was carved the sacred emblem of a pelican feeding its young with its own blood.

We passed up one street and round by the back of the stage to the other. The scenery was wretchedly daubed, the mechanical arrangements ludicrously simple. It was just such a primitive structure as might have been pitched by any set of strolling Thespians; whether in the middle ages or now-a-days, except that its dimensions were extraordinary, and perhaps it was a little more firmly put together than what we usually see at a fair or kermess. There was less canvas and more scantling. Some tall poplars, evidently planted to mark out the spot, stood in a row along the outer sides of the theatre, and they lent a certain finish to the edifice. Behind, extended the glorious vale of the Ammer, with noble groups of mountains on either hand, forming an exquisite background to the whole.

The sun had now set, and a star or two glimmered in the heavens. We turned and left the vacant playhouse with contemptuous indifference. It had no meaning for us now: Four and twenty hours later it would have awakened a world of moving associations. As

it was, it seemed a very paltry arena for a spectacle that was attracting the *elite* of Europe, and drawing hundreds of intelligent and distinguished people even from beyond the Atlantic.

"I forgot to take the number of my seat, and I very much fear I have lost my ticket," remarked Theodore, in his usual measured tones, stopping by the road-side to search his pockets.

"I expect we shall be dreadfully disappointed to-morrow, and your loss will be quite unimportant," Grahame observed.

"It is really very curious"—I began.

"Someone remarks that it is *really* very *curious*," said Harrington, with a burst of laughter, in which we all joined.

And so we wandered back, chattering and joking, and lost our way half-a-dozen times in the labyrinth of cottages and lanes; while the fire-flies flickered through the hedges, and the cricket and corncrake disturbed the calm warm night with their incessant noise.



CHAPTER III.

WHILST we slept, masses (I am informed) were being celebrated from hour to hour in the village church, beginning at three o'clock a.m. On these festival occasions great numbers of communicants attend, including, as I am told, most of the performers in the Passions Spiel. We had examined the church during our evening stroll, and had found it a large highly decorated building, with gilded ornaments and paintings, and artificial flowers and effigies of the saints therein. A figure of the Madonna, four feet high, holding in her arms the infant Jesus, stood upon the steps leading up to the altar. This effigy was attired in an elaborate costume of old brocade and lace, and a tinsel coronet was on the head. It

appeared to be an object of devout admiration to our fellow-travellers from the Walchen See, who were passing round the church at the same time as ourselves, and who seemed much impressed and delighted with its splendours. To them the gilt foil was a crown of pure gold, and the painted visage a type of celestial beauty. One might have smiled at such puerilities elsewhere, but amidst these simple-hearted child-like peasants, I could only regard with tenderness the evidences, however barbarous, of their devotion. To a large section of English society there is something absolutely repulsive in making a stage-play of the sufferings of our Redeemer, or in setting up a huge painted doll in the house of God ; but the eye only sees that which it brings with it the power of seeing, and amongst an artless rustic population, capable of the most vivid faith, the highest aspirations may, perhaps, be kindled through toylike means, and from scenes which would jar on more refined sensibilities these simple Christian souls may derive comfort and edification.

Such were my observations to Grahame as we were leaving the consecrated building.

“And what about the second commandment?” he said.

I woke about six and was immediately put into requisition to procure water for the baths. Our host brought it himself in a small carafe. I explained we wanted more, much more; and he returned with a moderate-sized can, which, to his astonishment, Grahame himself in his dressing suit, filled again and again at the fountain before the door. Foreigners, I understand, generally confine their ablutions to the use of a damp napkin, and the amount of water employed by us in washing must be regarded by them with wonder not unmixed with dread. Not the least of the inconveniences of continental travel is the miserable inadequacy of washing utensils in one's bed-room. Even in first-class hotels the jug and basin are often not more capacious than those meant for milk and slops at the tea-table, while the towels are commonly strips of thin linen stinking of putty or some such nastiness.

Delicious coffee, fresh rolls, butter, and eggs were the items of our pastoral breakfast. Our table was laid on the green in front of the house, and the sweet morning air brought us appetite for this simple meal. Our hostess could not provide us with dinner, owing to the family taking part in the Play. She was very sorry, she explained, but they would all be at the theatre, and engaged throughout the day. Whereupon we arranged to dine at the Post.

It was very different from a Sunday morning in England; yet, after we had got together our books and opera glasses and were gently walking through the meadows to the theatre, something in the stillness of the sunny landscape, and a foreshadowing of the solemnity we were about to witness, reminded me of Sabbath days spent in the country when I was a child.

"We ought to hear the church bells sounding in the distance," I said, "and the illusion would be complete."

"Sunday morning in the country," said Grahame, "is the very essence of tranquillity."

"Sunday in the country," Harrington remarked, "is the most tedious day in the whole week, and makes me anything but tranquil. When you have been to church there is nothing else to do."

"You can read the county paper," suggested Grahame.

"And sleep during the sermon," added Theodore, "a privilege we shall not be able to indulge in to-day."

We entered at the back of the auditorium and found an immense assemblage before us. I was told there were four or five thousand people present. Our seats were excellently situated. The greatest decorum and quietude prevailed. It was not like being at church, of course, but it resembled the provincial music festivals of our Cathedral towns in England.

Here, perhaps, I should dot down some notices, gathered from Mr. MacColl's little work, on the origin of the Ober Ammergau Passion Play, to which book I am already indebted for many particulars. The play itself is of great antiquity; but its decennial

performance at this village dates from the year 1633, when the plague, in the space of three weeks, carried off 84 of the inhabitants, and the terrified survivors registered a vow that if God heard their cry, and removed this sore affliction, they would represent every ten years "for thankful remembrance and edifying contemplation, and by the help of the Almighty, the sufferings of Jesus the Saviour of the world." Tradition affirms that the plague was stayed, and from that period till now, these regular representations have continued. About 1780 it was determined that all miracle plays should be put down throughout Germany, but an exception was made in favour of Ober Ammergau. On more than one occasion since, it has been threatened with extinction, but hitherto the villagers have pleaded their sacred vow, and have obtained the necessary royal sanction. Now, however, that it has become a popular spectacle, attracting its thousands and tens of thousands from afar, serious doubts, I am told, exist of the propriety of its continuance; and from more than one person I

heard that this would probably be its final presentation.

We were scarcely seated before the clock struck eight. A gun boomed again and again through the quiet valley. There was a hush of expectation over the crowded audience, and simultaneously the orchestra began to play a very simple but pleasing overture. This music is the arrangement, and much of it the original composition of Ottmar Weis, a Benedictine monk of Ettal, who was schoolmaster of Ober Ammergau at the beginning of the present century. It is a very characteristic portion of the performance. Not a bar of it is allowed to be copied or published. The singers learn their parts by heart and keep them strictly secret. Very properly, visitors are specially forbidden to take notes during the Play. The band appeared to be full, and they performed their parts most creditably. The accompaniments were sometimes of elaborate construction, and the musicians laboured under the disadvantage of playing in the open air, but I rarely heard a false note.

As the overture drew to a close there came forth from either side of the stage a succession of strange figures, clothed in long bright-coloured robes, over which were tunics of white muslin bordered with lace, reaching to the knee. They wore a classical fillet round the head, and a classical mantle upon the shoulders, and classic sandals upon the feet. Their dresses, though various in hue—violet, green, crimson, blue, olive, scarlet, yellow—were of like fashion, and their difference of sex was lost in the general characteristic of an abstract impersonation. Gently they filed on till they formed a curved line of 19 or 20 across the entire stage, and there they rested in the bright sunshine with their hands crossed upon their breasts. Then we perceived that in the centre of all was a tall, handsome, black-bearded man, the Choragus, Johann Dimmer, who, stepping to the front, commenced, in chant-like recitative, the Prologue—

“Wirf zum heiligen Staunen dich nieder,
Von Gottes Fluch gebeugtes Geschlecht!
Friede dir! — aus Sion Gnade wieder!
Nicht ewig zürnet Er,
Der Beleidigte,—ist sein Zurnen gleich gerecht.”

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Soon the others joined their voices with his, and, with graceful gesticulations, the whole band sang together. There was nothing very striking in the melody. It rose and fell in sweet and plaintive cadence. But the clever combination of the voices and the elegant variety of movement and gesture struck me with surprise; and I recognised instantly a chorus superior to any I ever saw in the opera houses of London or Paris. Every word they sang reached us—every note told. Their pure articulation and strong sweet tones, penetrated far and near, while their remarkable unconsciousness of manner, and the earnest devotion of their countenances, carried conviction to our hearts. It was like the opening line of an Epic poem, pregnant with promise.

Still singing, they divided in the midst and drew back a little, so as to reveal the front of the theatre proper, the curtain of which was slowly rising. And whilst they pointed to the *tableau* within, and sweetly sang the moral it should convey, we saw upon the inner stage a

group of Adam and Eve being driven out of Paradise. Shall I confess?—I was disappointed. It was rather wooden and tawdry.

Many years ago I saw the same *tableau* in London, when, to the scandal of respectability, a certain Madame Wharton was exhibiting her superb figure in public at an entertainment at which I fancy only gentlemen were admitted to be present. That picture I can recall now. Only Michael with the flaming sword stood behind the guilty pair. There was no scenery, no accessories of any kind. Yet, by the artful distribution of light and shadow and by the introduction of dramatic gesture, the effect was exquisite. The man remained with his face buried in his hands; and Eve, just as the curtain fell, turned and gave one sad imploring look towards the past. But the heavy blade still flamed above them; and, in the sudden anguish and terror of her countenance, we could discover the closed gates of Paradise themselves "with dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms."

Nothing in point of artistic effect to

compare with this was to be found at Ober Ammergau, any more than the voice of a Mario or a Marimon among the singers. Nevertheless, the pictures were sufficiently meritorious and they served their purpose; while the truthful spirit of their analogies breathed through the chorus, and promptly reached the heart of the spectator.

Of the chorus themselves I cannot speak too highly. To me they were a revelation. I could understand at once the importance of this grand adjunct to the ancient drama, an adjunct without which I begin to think no play can be perfect, and into the spirit of which I never before could enter. I could now reach to a clear idea of the work done by these miracle mummeries (even when most debased) in the dark ages, in teaching and consoling the masses. Something in the simple gravity of their manner, something in the quaint but not inelegant movement with which they laid their mantles across their arms and stepped daintily along the stage as they retired, seemed to carry one into another age, and to land one among

new experiences They were at once the most novel and the most ancient sight my eyes had ever rested upon. No ruin of the remotest antiquity—Stonehenge, Palmyra, the Coliseum itself—not even the sculptured marbles of Assyria or Egypt ever so resuscitated the past. Nothing but the traditional descent of a high and all but forgotten histrionic art could account for the marvellous grace and strange dignity of these rustic singers. The more I reflect, the more I am astonished at their performance.

But I must return to the Play itself.

Scarcely had the last member of the chorus passed from the stage, when the curtain drew up again, amidst jubilant shouts of "Hosannah," and a crowd of several hundred men, women, and children, in oriental garb, came pouring in from behind, strewing palms and garments for the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. This opened the great tragedy of the Passion. It was admirably arranged. Anything more trying than the apparition of Jesus riding upon a donkey can scarcely be imagined ; but it was conducted with a propriety, nay, with



a certain grandeur, that was superior to ridicule and left nothing to be desired.

That one figure held us, once for all, spell-bound. To quote from a writer* to whom I am already indebted, the whole life and reality of the drama is centered here on Him, "from whom it is difficult even for a minute to withdraw one's gaze. Though the interest never flags throughout, yet the difference is instantly felt in every scene where He is absent. From the moment He is first seen seated on an ass, clothed in His purple robe and red mantle, with His long dark hair and majestic countenance, in the pathos of its unearthly sorrow, hearing the plaudits of the multitude, but taking no pleasure in them, and, 'setting His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem,' because there He wills to die, He draws to himself every eye and every heart."

The beautiful form of Joseph Mair had acquired a solemnity and repose which I had fancied wanting when I had seen him off the

* *Guardian* Newspaper, October 4th, 1871.

stage. It was the exact replica of an old Italian painting, but with a vivid reality in addition which life alone could convey. To describe him I might almost copy the famous letter of Lentulus to the Roman Senate, which is supposed to contain the earliest description of our Saviour's person, although of apocryphal origin.

“A man of lofty stature, of serious and imposing countenance, inspiring love as well as fear in those who behold him. His hair is the colour of wine, straight and without lustre as low as the ears, but thence glossy, flowing upon the shoulders, and divided down the centre of the head, after the manner of the Nazarenes. The forehead is smooth and serene, the face without blemish, of a pleasant, slightly ruddy colour. The expression noble and engaging. Nose and mouth of perfect form; the beard abundant, and of the same colour as the hair.”

I may add, the complexion of Joseph Mair is of that clear “corn-yellow” tint which so delights the connoisseur of old Italian pictures,

and which John of Damascus, a writer of the 8th century, states was a special characteristic that Jesus inherited from his mother. His long hair was now carefully arranged. His dress was the traditional purple robe, with a red mantle flowing to the feet. His manners were almost monotonous in their impressive gravity. The tone of voice was clear and solemn, the step uniformly slow, and his eyes were mostly fixed in a trance-like gaze that spoke of the highest spiritual experience. As an impersonation it was perfect. And, as the Play went on, the more perfect and the more startling did it become. Never for an instant did he falter from the grand ideal of his part. Whether with conventional abruptness he struck the money-changers and drove them from the temple, whether he bewailed over Jerusalem or spoke familiarly with his mother and his disciples, he was always the Christ, never the man.

In the agony at Gethsemane, in the terrible scene where he was degraded and set at nought by the soldiers, and in that mysterious meeting

with Mary Magdalene, after the Resurrection—in each, in all, he attained that rare pinnacle of art at which all art is concealed, and the actor is wholly absorbed into his character.

Nor was he alone. The other performers were admirable in their parts. More than one of them might command a fortune were he to take to the stage as a profession. Caiaphas, Peter, and, beyond all, Judas, showed an intimate knowledge of dramatic art, though it was comparatively untutored and immature. Where did the men learn such dignity of deportment? Who could have trained them so to sway the feelings of others by a tone, a glance, a gesture? They tell me these actors are but villagers with no experience beyond the range of their own unfrequented hills. Yet some genius raises them above condition or period or country : and their audience—home and foreign, young and old, gentle and simple—sit astonished and enthralled at their almost faultless performance.

The fact of the representation being in the open air, while it detracted from scenic effect

and must have been most trying to the player, certainly lent a stronger air of reality to the show. With the canopy of blue sky above, and the fair background of hills, with the birds diving to and fro overhead, and the butterflies fluttering amidst the mimic foliage of the stage, we seemed to view the country of Judea itself and to breathe the air of Palestine. There was something also in the steady progression of the play which gave to it the force of fact. Here was no waiting between the acts, no clumsy alterations of scenery, no hesitation on the part of the performers, no evidence of prompter or stage-manager. Chorus, *tableau*, and scene followed one another from beginning to end like the steady flow of Time, "without haste, without rest;" and this calm regularity, this natural decorum, came home to one's experience more than the spasmodic vitality of the ordinary theatre, and endowed this grand drama with a majesty and an intense reality unknown elsewhere. The difficulties with which these performers had to contend were immense, but they were surmounted and left far behind. The

barbaric roughness of the play-house, the undignified surroundings as of a country fair, the necessary imperfection of rustic amateurs, the feeble support of the most trumpery accessories, the exhausting length of the performance, the vast space to be filled with their voices—all this, and more went for nothing. The real secret of it was, these peasant actors lived their parts and their enchanted audience joined with them.

The construction of the Play itself is very clever. The sufferings of our Lord are, of course, the one subject, and it is worked out with logical accuracy and poetic taste. As an exposition of the doctrine of the Atonement it is unique, keeping, with a grand severity that knows nothing sectarian, within the sacred ring of Scripture. It is purely Catholic in its doctrine, Catholic without being Roman. The anguish felt by Christ on beholding the desecration of his Father's house, and which urged him into that outburst of righteous indignation when he overthrew the tables of the money-changers and cast out them that sold doves,

drew down upon him the latent enmity of the Jewish priesthood, and with slow but certain steps led on to Golgotha. The story is so familiar to us all; yet it is wonderful how new it seemed when clothed in shape. The fine network of type and antitype in which this trilogy is knit together, came upon one with all the charm of novelty and the irresistible power of truth. When reading the sacred history in our testaments we too often forget the kindred events of the older Bible, while the Jewish Scriptures frequently strike one as harsh and inscrutable when not viewed in the light of the later revelation. Here the twain were united, and the highest meaning of both at once elicited. Neither book nor sermon could be so exhaustive or so telling as this triple teaching of eye, ear, and heart through dramatic action, verbal address, and pictorial illustration, combined.

The opening *Vorstellung* or division of the play is called "Der Einzug Christi in Jerusalem"—Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The 2nd is called "Der hohe Rath"—The

high Council—in which the *tableau* of Joseph's brethren plotting his death was explained by the chorus as a type of the Council of the chief priests and Pharisees, who, in an animated scene, next discussed the advisableness and means of compassing the destruction of Jesus.

The 3rd *Vorstellung* is called "Der Abschied in Bethania"—The Farewell at Bethany—and is so beautiful throughout that it deserves special observation. It is introduced by two *tableaux*. The first—Tobias taking leave of his parents—makes a very lovely picture. The youth is on the point of turning from his home to follow the angel. His mother still clings to him in tears, while his father, Tobit, stands behind with his hands uplifted in blessing. The scenery was quite Eastern, the arrangements very artistic. Whilst we regarded this charming representation of the sorrows of parting, the chorus sang most sweetly some verses reminding us how, in like manner, Jesus separated from his mother and friends, led away by the angel of compassion

to fulfil his predicted mission. The curtain fell while the last lines were being chanted, and rose again directly afterwards to show us the Bride of the Canticles forlorn amongst her maidens. This *tableau* seemed ineffective, perhaps from its juxtaposition to the very lovely one preceding, but the song which accompanied it was strikingly beautiful and was well delivered.

One by one the phantom-like forms of the chorus passed away, and, as the last vanished from the scene, we beheld Jesus and his disciples entering the street of Bethany. The supper at the house of Simon took place next. The playwright has accepted the view that Mary Magdalene was the sister of Lazarus, and has introduced them and their sister Martha "cumbered with much serving" in this scene. I do not know that this poetical license is altogether to be condemned, as the matter is obscure and has little to do with the history; but I think myself, looking at it from a literary point of view, the character of Martha is superfluous and might have been

omitted. The acting of Josepha Lang as Mary Magdalene was slightly conventional, but far better than that of the other female actors. Her costume was a blue robe, with an orange colour mantle. She was a fair woman, of five or six-and-twenty, with abundant silken hair, an intelligent sympathetic countenance, and rather an elegant style. The washing of Christ's feet with her tears, and the wiping them with the hair of her head, were conveyed by a few graceful movements, and she then retired, apparently overcome with emotion. While Jesus was bidding adieu to his friends, as he was leaving the house (having forewarned them all of his approaching death), his mother came in and joined the rest in dissuading him from going up to Jerusalem. This pathetic scene is generally much commended. In it Joseph Mair showed human feelings, and affected an emphatic mode of acting; but Franziska Flunger, who took the character of Mary, was more than twenty years too young for the part; and the pathos of their separation suffered from the incongruity of her appearance.

The 4th *Vorstellung*, "Letzer Gang Jesu nach Jerusalem"—the last journey to Jerusalem—was also very fine. The music, too, increased in beauty. A grand *tableau* of Vashti and Esther, with a crowd of courtiers around the throne of King Ahasuerus, filled the inner theatre. In ingenious and pleasing stanzas, the chorus interpreted this type of the rejected Jew and the accepted Gentile, and continued, after the curtain had fallen, to utter, in touching strains, a cry of warning to Jerusalem. We next saw Jesus and his disciples passing over the Mount of Olives. His grief, as he gazed upon his beloved city, was very affectingly portrayed, and seemed to re-echo the exquisite chorus, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" which was still ringing in our ears. Jesus, having despatched Peter and John to prepare the Passover, soon went out of sight with the rest of the disciples, except Judas, an evil-looking man, whom we remarked for the first time in the preceding scene, when he protested against the waste

of precious ointment at Bethany. From this time he takes a prominent part in the play, and he has, here, a scene to himself in which he is tempted by his thoughts. He is afterwards encouraged by one of the traders whom Christ had driven from the temple, who joins him and proposes that he should offer to betray Jesus to the priests for a sum of money.

The 5th *Vorstellung* is called "Das heil. Abendmahl"—the holy supper—and is introduced by two *tableaux*, the manna in the wilderness and the bringing of the grapes of Eshcol. In the first of these it was a great mistake to represent the manna as falling. The bits of paper which did duty for manna dropped like snowflakes upon the heads of the Israelites and spotted them all over, whereas, in Scripture, the people are represented as going out in the morning and finding the manna lying like hoarfrost upon the ground. The chorus which followed the *tableau* of the grapes of Canaan—"Gut ist der Herr"—was one of those sweet and simple compositions

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which cling to one's memory ; and, for days afterwards, I found myself repeating—

“ Gut ist der Herr, gut ist der Herr
Im neuen Bunde reichet er
Sein Fleisch und Blut im Saale
Zu Salem bei dem Mahle.”

When the curtain rose again it was to show the streets of Jerusalem with a man “bearing a pitcher.” John and Peter then appeared—characteristic representatives of the favourite disciples—and spoke with the man, who led them to his master's house. Then followed the celebration of the Passover by Christ and the Apostles ; after which arose the dispute amongst the twelve who should be the greatest, and the mystical rebuke administered by their Lord and Master in the washing of their feet. The shamed and terrified look of Judas when Jesus approached him, the reluctance of Peter, the half-puzzled aspect of the rest, and, above all, the wonderful immobility of the principal actor, were admirable studies of dramatic physiognomy. The whole of this scene was given with a grand solemnity of manner which was most impressive, and which reached a

climax in the institution of the sacrament, the consummate dignity of which recalled to me and put to shame the gaudy trappings and pompous worship which so disfigured that high mass at Antwerp. With an august simplicity that was more imposing than gorgeous ceremonies, Jesus administered the bread and wine, placing the bread within their mouths and holding the cup to their lips, while the disciples received the same with noble reverence. There were no mesmeric passes over paten and chalice, no prostrations and mysterious signs on the part of the recipients. It was the divine mystery fresh from the hands of its Maker, and free from all taint of human superstition.

The 6th *Vorstellung* is "Der Verrather"—The Betrayer. The type is the selling of Joseph by his brethren. This was a picturesque group. In the background were seen the Ishmaelitic merchants with their camels; in the foreground the brothers, counting over the money. The chorus apostrophised the far worse crime of Judas in selling his Lord and

Master. Then the curtain rose, and a long and stormy scene in the council chamber of the Jewish Sanhedrim took place, in which Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea protested against the execution of Jesus, but were overborne by Caiaphas and the other members of the priesthood. Judas was then introduced, and the bargain was struck, and everything was arranged for the betrayal of Jesus.

We now reach the 7th *Vorstellung*, "Jesus am Oelberge"—Jesus on Mount Olivet—which brings the first part of the play to a conclusion with a vivid representation of our Lord's agony in the garden.

We had now been sitting for more than three hours with our attention continually on the stretch, and I confess I was dreadfully tired ; but the instant the chorus came filing in on either side my interest sprang up as fresh as ever, and I listened to their singing with undiminished enjoyment. The first type was a group of Adam and his family tilling the ground in the sweat of their brow; the second was that of Joab kissing Amasa while

he drove a sword into his side, at Gibeon. The figures were as motionless as waxwork, the scenery and accessories well chosen. With their own peculiar grace the chorus explained the parallel betwixt these scenes and those which we were about to see, and they retired as usual. Then, after a moment's pause, the curtain of the theatre went up slowly, and through the darkened interior we could discern the figures of Jesus and his disciples crossing Cedron and entering the garden of Gethsemane.

There was more attempt at stage effect in this than in any other scene, but it was not obtrusive. The gloom threw a special mystery over the stately form of Joseph Mair, and when he had passed from among the palms and olives, and stood in the midst, a soft light fell upon his face, showing such a sublime expression of entire devotion as no picture ever attained. The whole scene was gone through exactly as in the Bible. Thrice he fell to the earth, bowed by the intensity of his anguish, and the third time a bright form bent over him for a moment, administering consolation. So deep was the interest during this beautiful and

touching scene that I myself was breathless with observation, and I could see every soul around me hanging forward in rapt attention, while not a sound, not a movement broke the stillness of the vast assembly. It was very lovely. It was very real. It required an effort almost to shake off the illusion and to remember where we were. The sudden entry of Judas with a number of soldiers bearing lanterns and torches created a picturesque confusion for a moment at the back of the stage. And, as the disciples gathered round their Lord, the traitor came on out of the darkness and said, "Hail, Master!" and kissed him. So Jesus was betrayed.

It was a magnificent conclusion to the first part of the Play. We absolutely required a breathing space, a few moments to ourselves to collect our thoughts and to comprehend the solemn meaning of what we had been witnessing.

We could only exclaim to one another as we hurried from the theatre—"It is wonderfully fine. It is extraordinary. I have never seen anything like this Passion Play."



CHAPTER IV.

LISTENING is like sherry and bitters, it gives one an appetite. Bean soup, boiled trout, roast veal, baked fowls, and some kind of pudding or *mehlspeise* disappeared before us, washed down by torrents of excellent beer. The tables in the rooms of the Posthouse were thronged with gourmands, if not with epicures. A party of Germans sat next to us, and I am bound to admit they far surpassed ourselves in repletion. High and low, gentle and simple, we sat around and feasted in a semi-barbarous fashion that was vulgar, perhaps, but was heroic, and reminded one of Ossian and Homer.

Grahame and myself never ceased talking about the Play while we took our share of all that was going.

"I should not be in the least surprised if it were brought over to England next year," he observed.

"I trust not," I said. "It would lose all its sentiment were it to become a mere spectacle. Beside, in England, even the pageant of the Lord Mayor's show is become obsolete and ridiculous. We are past the epoch of Coventry plays and Chester mysteries, and we could no more revert to them than we could return to litters instead of railway conveyance, or pewter instead of porcelain."

"Yet you are charmed with it here?"

"Yes, the same as a naturalist would be startled and delighted were he to come upon a living ichthyosaurus or pterodactyl on the shores of a modern lake. It is the marvel and the mystery of the Ober Ammergau *Passions Spiel* that in this secluded valley we behold forms of art which have been extinct for ages elsewhere, and that we witness a purity of spirit which had died out in the performance of these miracle-plays centuries before they were swept away by that irresistible tide of mental progress

which rose and flooded Europe in the 16th century.

“When was the last miracle-play performed in England?”

“It is said to have been in the reign of James the First. It was also that of Christ's Passion, and took place at Ely House, on Holborn-hill, and thousands of people were present. I have no doubt even that was a miracle-play in its dotage. And what would the revival be? Even more idiotic than the mummerly of our High Church congregations bowing, as they leave the church, to a table, where generally there is not a crucifix, much less the real presence of the Romish faith.”

“I do most sincerely wish,” interposed Theodore, in his languid tones, “you fellows would be quiet and would finish your food. To me it is very distressing to talk and to eat and to drink, much more to hear and see others. If I were to invent a race (and you know it is the foible of the day) either by selection or development or fortuitous introduction, they should draw in nourishment from the atmosphere and communicate with their eyes.”

"I should fancy a colony of chameleons would serve your purpose at once," replied his brother, "as they live upon air, and I don't suppose they have much to communicate."

"My coming race," said Harrington, "should be web-footed and winged, so as to avoid the nuisance of travelling by boat and rail."

"And," I added, "perhaps they might grow a natural cigar between their lips when they were not engaged in eating."

More *mehlspeise*, some ripe plums and a glass of wine, and, like giants refreshed, we returned straight to the theatre.

Already the orchestra were playing some introductory strains; and before we could reach our seats the indefatigable chorus had formed a curve, like a rainbow, across the stage and had commenced a very touching prologue, calling upon the re-assembled multitude to recollect that the sorrows we had seen and those greater ones to come were borne by Jesus upon our account, and should therefore awaken our sympathy and our respect. Then the curtain

was raised upon a *tableau* of Micaiah smitten by Zedekiah in the presence of Ahab and Jehoshaphat. The parallel followed in the scene where Jesus was brought before Annas, and one of the officers which stood by struck him with the palm of his hand. This took place upon the balcony of the house on the left hand of the theatre proper. This scene was rather ineffective, although the bearing of the principal personage could not have been surpassed, and where the blow was given it fell like an electric shock upon the audience. This 8th *Vorstellung* is called "Jesus vor Annas." The 9th is "Jesus vor Kaiaphas;" and to give some idea of the language of the play, I will here insert a literal translation of the whole part sung by the chorus. The dialogue itself is not allowed to be published. As far as I could judge it is very forcibly written.

The singers enter on either side and arrange themselves with stately gravity in an arched line across the stage. In recitative they chant,

"How my heart bleeds within me! Alas!
Jesus like a malefactor must bear the malice

of sinners—Betrayed, disgraced, bound and stricken—In whose eyes does not a tear tremble ? From Annas hurried away to Kaiaphas. What will he there ? Ah he must suffer ! ”

They draw back, still singing,

“See here in a picture this scene of sorrow!”

Within the theatre proper appears a *tableau* of Naboth, kneeling on the ground, being stoned to death by the myrmidons of Jezebel.

The chorus change the measure of the music.

“Let Naboth die ! Away with him to death

He has blasphemed thee, O King, he has blasphemed God !

Let him be destroyed out of Israel !—

Thus the savage venom of slanderous tongues,
Hired to a false oath by wicked Jezebel.”

The melody again alters, and they sing in dulcet strains as the curtain descends.

“Alas ! They avenge with death what Naboth never committed. The vineyard will be the King’s, adjudicated to him by villains. This is a true picture of the world. It is often the same now-a-day. The poor innocent lamb

falls a victim to the strong wolf. Ye mighty gods of the world, established for the good of mankind, forget not, in the exercise of your duties, the invisible Judge. With him all men are equal, whether poor or rich, noble or beggar. Justice alone is of value to him !”

Again, the chorus divide, and we behold Job sitting upon a heap of dust, marred with suffering. He has laid aside his garments, and has only a cloth cast about his miserable body. On one side his three friends regard him with looks of doubt and scorn ; on the other stands his wife with a cruel sneer upon her face.

The singers begin.

“ See what a man ! Alas ! a skeleton—a horror—a loathsomeness of nature, as from cheek and lip the parched skin peels away ! See what a man ! Alas ! how flayed ! One sees through to the very marrow. His wounds are corrupt, and rottenness hath eaten into his bones. Ah, what a man ! a Job in misery ! Alas ! from whom does he not draw tears ? His wife, his friends rail at him and mock him to his face. Ah, what a man ! Who indeed would

take him for a man ? From head to foot bereft of all adornment."

The curtain here descends, and the chorus continue.

" Ah, what a man ! Your eyes weep hot tears. Alas, Jesus—alas—a man no more, the scorn and scoff of men was He ! Ah, what a man ! Oh, all ye whose hearts are stirred ! Alas ! that Jesus—Jesus, God's own son, should be the scorn and scoff of vile slaves. In the infinite strife of afflictions, Ah ! what a man !"

Of course this translation gives but a very feeble idea of the force of the original, to which was added the subtle influence of music—" that inarticulate, unfathomable speech," as Carlyle calls it, " which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us for a moment gaze into that."

Upon the retirement of the chorus the drama proceeded with the arraignment of Jesus before the High Priest. False witnesses were called forward, and gave their evidence with vehement rancour. Soldiers jeered and persecuted the hapless prisoner. Caiaphas, wearing a gorgeous ephod and mitre, declaimed with his

usual energetic eloquence. The scene glowed with action. The dialogue sparkled with life. And through it all one wan figure stood out alone, his handsome features humbled yet majestic, calm yet full of woe. It was a sight to kindle pity and devotion. St. John and St. Peter now approached, coming down one of the side streets anxiously seeking for tidings of the trial. St. Peter's usual courage had altogether failed him. Timidly following his companion he remained behind in the hall, while St. John pushed on towards the tribunal. Presently he approached the fire, round which the soldiers were gathered warming themselves, and there, with extraordinary pertinacity and cowardice, he thrice denied his Lord. For the second time the cock crew, and, at the same moment, Jesus passed back through the hall, being led away condemned to death. As he passed he turned and gave a warning look of sorrow to his distressed disciple, who, already in an agony at what he had done, fled in an opposite direction, weeping bitterly.

Here Judas came in, anxious to learn how

matters were going, being already uneasy in conscience at the step he had so rashly taken. The same spasmodic shudder which came over him when he received the sop was again perceptible, together with a sense of unrest and nervous excitement, suggestive of bewilderment of purpose and of brooding guilt. The *role* of Judas, as represented in the ancient miracle-plays, is that of an avaricious but not altogether infamous man. And no doubt this is a just conception of the character. He is supposed to have embezzled money from the bag of which he had charge, and to have caught at the opportunity of gain offered him by the Jewish priests, without thinking for a moment that it would lead to the death of his master, whose miraculous powers he had often witnessed, and who, he fancied, would easily escape out of the hands of his gaolers. One can indeed scarcely imagine a man, the chosen associate of Christ and the apostles, being altogether evil, though one can understand and deplore his being tempted into crime so great that there was no place of repentance found for him.

And this introduces one of the most painful scenes in the tragedy, the 10th *Vorstellung*, "Judas verzweifelt"—Judas in despair—which was preceded by a *tableau* of Cain driven from among men by his guilty conscience, accompanied by a remarkable chorus picturing that inner hell of guilt from which the sinner cannot flee. The Sanhedrim having now confirmed the sentence of death pronounced by Caiaphas, and Judas finding that Jesus either cannot or will not save himself, the wretched betrayer came rushing into the council chamber, determined to give back the money and to make a last effort to retrieve his iniquity. With the wildest gesticulations he implored the chief priests to spare his master, and raved before them in delirious remorse. They treated him with coldness, and drove him from their presence with stinging taunts. Unable to bear the thought of facing Jesus again after his ingratitude and treachery, Judas was next seen hurrying through a desert place wherein a solitary withered tree suggested to the wretched man his doom. With pain we beheld him

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wringing his hands in self-accusation, without hope of pardon or redemption, and the curtain fell as he was preparing to destroy himself. The man's anguish and suicidal desperation were given with distressing fidelity by the very clever actor Gregory Lechner, who took this difficult, but strange to say popular *rôle*, ten years ago. From the moment when Judas realized the impossibility of repairing his fault, and was ware of the unutterable magnitude of his crime, the man Lechner looked like a wild hunted beast. Always sinister in expression of face, he now became transmuted into an incarnation of evil and horror of punishment—a ghost-like form with terrific eyes that burned in torment, reminding one of that fine description of an Eastern Genie in "The Shaving of Shagpat"—"his eyes like two hollow pits dug by the shepherds for the wolf, *and the wolf in them,*" and still more of that awful passage in St. Luke's gospel—"Then entered Satan into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve." The uncompromising exactitude of the whole play stands out through these

scenes in grim nakedness. There is no artistic veil thrown over what is unsightly. The spectator's feelings are harrowed, not spared; and, as in real life, circumstance rides down all, and we have to submit to the inexorable logic of facts. It is rather singular that the performer of the part of Judas is often praised in descriptions of old mysteries. It is a *rôle* which perhaps admits of more acting than the other characters. It certainly excited the peasantry of Ober Ammergau more than any other, and it appears to have always taken with the populace.

The 11th *Vorstellung*, "Jesus vor Pilatus," and the 12th "Christus vor Herodes," were, I thought, rather tiresome. The *tableaux* were Daniel accused before Darius, and Samson pulling down the temple of Dagon.

The 13th *Vorstellung*, "Geiszelung und Dornenkronung"—the scourging and crowning with thorns—was illustrated by two *tableaux*. 1st: The sons of Jacob deceiving their father by showing him Joseph's coat. 2nd: Isaac bound upon the altar, with Abraham holding

the ram caught in the thorny thicket, the interpretations of which appeared rather far fetched. As the curtain of the theatre rose, soldiers were seen turning from the pillar where they had been scourging Jesus. In mockery they arrayed him in the scarlet robe, put a reed into his hand, and, with sticks, pressed down the crown of thorns upon his lacerated brow. Then they buffeted and ill-treated him, and pushed him off the stool they had set as his throne. There was no limit to their rough ribaldry, nor was there any limit to the serene dignity and endurance with which it was met. One was glad when it was over, and the particoloured chorus streamed in once more across the stage, commencing the 14th *Vorstellung*, "Jesus wird zum Kreutode verurtheilt"—Jesus condemned to be crucified.

Some very fine music proceeded during the exhibition of two *tableaux*—the glory of Joseph in Egypt and the scape-goat. While the latter was visible the singers explained the type of the two goats as referring to Jesus and Barabbas, one of whom was sacrificed, the other let go

free. At its close a tumult was audible behind the scenes, and a duet followed between the chorus and the unseen crowd which was most effective. Sometimes the voices mingled in counter-cries, sometimes answered one another with weird echoes. Tender expostulation and passionate defiance struggled like the combat of birds in mid-air.

“Hark! already to the murder-cry!”—
“Not this man but Barabbas.”—“Nay. Let Jesus free. Alas! how wildly sounds the cry of murder.”—“Crucify him! Crucify him!”—
“Ah, why? why? what evil hath he done?”—
“If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar’s friend.”—“Jerusalem! Jerusalem! God will avenge on you the blood of his elect!”—“Let it fall upon us and upon our children.”

Sadly and solemnly the chorus sang in answer. “It comes, it comes upon you and your children,” and with a pathetic gesture slowly turned and left the stage.

The noisy multitude now poured in from the side streets and gathered in front of the house of Pilate.

Peter Flunger, who bore the part of the famous Procurator, was a distinguished looking man whose mode of acting was characterized by a gentle grandeur that lent great interest to the *rôle*. This actor personated the Christus in 1850, and he is poetically described by the author of "Art in the Mountains" as still wearing "the shadow of the Cross upon his brow." A writer in the "Guardian" newspaper, whom I have already quoted, considers that the earnestness and gravity of his demeanour was out of place and was hardly in accordance with "the ordinary estimate of 'the unjust judge.'" But herein, I think, is one of those points of marked originality which characterize the play.

Pontius Pilate is brought before us under the guise of a rather amiable Roman patrician, holding the unenviable post of Governor over a seditious and exitable city. The character is portrayed quite unaffected by mediæval traditions, and it bears an air of primitive simplicity and truthfulness. It is the vacillating Pilate of St. Matthew or St. John, not the merciless tyrant

sketched in Jewish prejudice by Philo and Josephus, not the wicked wretch whose impious life found a fitting termination in the waters of "the infernal lake" upon the ill-starred heights above Lucerne. That *miserrimus, perfidus, indignusque Pilatus* whose degenerate history and supernatural fate we may read in monkish chronicles, or may gather from the romantic pages of Sir Walter Scott, is no more visible in the Passion Play than in the narrative of the Evangelists. Sewell, Kitto and a host of other commentators animadvert upon the "sneer," the "scoff," the "mocking question," and echo that shallow observation with which Lord Bacon opened his celebrated essay upon Truth—"What is Truth, said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer"—But it was in gravest enquiry that the words "*Was ist Wahrheit?*" were pronounced by the Pilate of the Passion Play, and, although the colloquy terminated here, as in the new Testament, it was slowly, and with an air of sad perplexity that the Governor turned and left the balcony. This representation struck me as being far more

natural and impressive, than as if, after having taken the trouble to closely interrogate the prisoner, after having been awed by the presence of the wonderful being before him and intimidated by the ominous message from his wife, Procula, after having deliberately proclaimed the faultlessness of the victim, Pilate had left him abruptly with an insolent taunt upon his lips.

As an educated Roman gentleman who was probably familiar with the ennobling essays of Cicero, and who may have read in their original the still more sublime pages of Plato, Pontius Pilate must have felt that here he had no ordinary criminal before him. Here was one who exhibited every perfection aimed at by philosophers, one who had openly reached that highest flight of virtue at which a good man becomes, as it were, intemporal and altogether independant of his fellow-beings and would not merely refrain from doing an injury but would not even resent one.

In the gracious presence of Christ, the Governor must have discovered a being superior

to all rank and station, a power beside whom his own ephemeral authority crumbled into dust, one who vividly exemplified these grand facts—that in spiritual matters worldly advantages or disadvantages vanish utterly—that no harm can touch the virtuous except loss of virtue—that the bearing witness of God's eternal Verity is the end and aim of human existence. Overpowered by such a revelation, is it likely that he should have been in a joking mood, or rather, as the Evangelist describes him, that he was "the more afraid?" When Pilate asked the famous question, "What is Truth?" I fancy there is little doubt that he did wait for an answer. Although the reply given in the apochryphal gospel attributed to the Procurator may not be literally correct, still, as it is probable there was no one else present to report the conversation, we may perhaps be allowed to accept the tradition that the Governor himself afterwards supplied some account of the interview, and, in the absence of other authority, may even credit the legendary reply, rather than take a fanciful view of Pilate's indifference and

cruelty, not in any way warranted by the only trustworthy authorities to which we have access.

The impersonation by the actor in the Passion Play, however, was based entirely upon gospel evidence; and in support of his conception of its gravity and earnestness we may call to mind what ceaseless efforts were made by the Roman Procurator to reprieve and save our Lord. Treating the offence as trivial, he first declined entering upon it at all, and desired the Jews to judge him themselves. Then he emphatically declared the prisoner to be innocent. He afterwards seized upon the fact of his being a Galilean to transfer him to another tribunal. He endeavoured to procure his release as the customary festival-boon. He tried to soften the breasts of his accusers by showing him after the scourging. He offered them, in choice, the notorious Barabbas. Nor did he give in to the clamour of the multitude until he was taunted with want of loyalty towards his imperial Master; and, at the last, he yielded with the worst possible grace, with

a passionate protest throwing off the blame from himself. In the royal title he insisted upon affixing to the Cross, as well as in the permission which he granted Joseph of Arimathea to take possession of the body, the tendency of his feelings was clearly shown; and though one certainly would not expect Pilate to be canonized, as is the case in the Abyssinian Church, one cannot but feel he has been rather maligned by those who have gibbeted him as the type of a wicked and unjust judge.

Occupying the high social position which he did, Pilate probably knew but little of the Galilean carpenter, whose sacred life was to be a turning point in the world's history. He does not appear to have been at first aware that Jesus was a Galilean, although he was commonly called Jesus of Nazareth. He may have heard of certain miracles attributed to the accused; he may have heard that this humble prophet represented the Jewish Messiah, and such rumours may have made him doubtful, and may have produced the remarkable vacillation

of his conduct. But it is more probable he regarded such reports as the mere exaggeration of popular excitement, and, as a heathen, it is likely he took no interest in the matter. His treatment of our Lord was most impartial and dispassionate. He behaved towards him with simple respect, and was neither harsh nor indifferent. He soon discovered that Jesus was the victim of sacerdotal malevolence, and at once pronounced emphatically that the accused had done nothing worthy of death; and he continued to urge every point that could be submitted in his favour.

Jesus himself indeed acquitted Pilate, and remarked that he who delivered him unto him had the greater sin. Caiaphas, in fact, was the person on whom, next to Judas, the infamy of the transaction should have fastened. He had been nominated to the high-priesthood by Valerius Gratus, and was devoted to the interest of the Romans. Cognizant of the fact that Pilate was at variance with the Jews, and that he had been reported at head quarters for his injudicious conduct in offending their reli-

gious prejudices, Caiaphas, with malignant cunning, seized on the international differences as a fulcrum by which he resistlessly overbalanced the weaker intentions of the already unpopular Governor. Pilate's error was that of weakness and timidity. His instincts were on the side of right, but he was overborne by circumstance.

Thus we saw him, standing in his splendid apparel, anxiously questioning the prisoner, and reluctantly giving up the struggle at the last,

“Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
Of dire necessity.”

A character to be in some respects pitied as much as blamed. That aristocratic form, that pale dreamy countenance, those cool and stately manners, even when stricken with anger, indecision, and awe, presented a picture as effective as any mediæval conception of haughty scorn, followed by Dantesque punishment; gave one a more real notion of the actual man than the flippant fancy of our great philosopher, or that vision of a spectre rising out of a mountain tarn, washing its hands with cries of mingled agony and horror, on the storm-beaten heights of Mount Pilatus.

The scene proceeded.

Barabbas was brought in below, between two guards — a miserable wretch, clad in a loathsome prison garb, trembling for his life. The Virgin with Mary Magdalene and St. John stood near, hoping against hope. Christ was again brought before the people: With redoubled rage they demanded his crucifixion. Pilate's wife sent in her message of portent. Having pleaded for the life of Jesus, the Governor washed his hands before them all and gave in finally to the popular cry, and we saw Mary fall back fainting into the arms of her companions.

As has happened upon more than one occasion, heavy thunder clouds had rolled up behind the mountains during the afternoon, and the peculiar foreboding of tempest began to gather over us, lending a new awe to the spectacle. Not that there was any immediate prospect of storm. The sun continued to shine; but the cumulous masses of silvery vapour piled themselves higher and higher through the blue sky, and an ominous oppression brooded over

the atmosphere. We could feel too, that the fatal climax of the tragedy was at hand, and nervous anticipation excited our interest every instant, more and more. The 15th *Vorstellung* is named "Der Kreuzweg,"—The way of the Cross. The appropriate *tableau* of Isaac carrying the wood for his own sacrifice was succeeded by two other remarkable *tableaux* of the fiery serpents and the brazen serpent, in which about three hundred actors took part, many of them little mites of children, forming groups of extraordinary beauty. In the one, death and agony were exhibited in every corner of the crowded stage, and it seemed a miracle how the postures of some of the performers could be maintained for an instant. The curtain went down as the chorus chanted the refrain-couplet, and rose again almost without a pause to show the entire mass transposed. In their midst Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and life and joy and praise beamed in the countenances of the children of Israel. The rapidity of the transposition was almost like sleight of hand :

The discipline of the actors could not have been more severely tested : But every posture in the assembly was full of grace, and they continued absolutely motionless yet eloquent of meaning. I fancy the *tableau* of Tobias was the most pictorial, but these were unquestionably the most astonishing of the entire series.

No sooner had the music ceased and the chorus passed out of sight than a procession entered from the back of the stage, headed by a Roman centurion on his charger ; and then, amidst surging multitudes, we perceived the form of Jesus tottering beneath the weight of his Cross. It was strangely impressive, the superlative dignity of the man of sorrows even in this black hour of humiliation and disgrace. Swooning with fatigue and in pitiable plight, he was urged along by the soldiers, the gaping crowd pushing on ahead to catch a sight of him. It was evident he could not go much farther. Every step seemed the last, and when at length he dropped, and one thought he must have died on the spot, his executioners consulted a moment how they should proceed.

We could see his mother and St. John and Mary Magdalene with their friends standing afar off, watching the procession, deeply agitated. The daughters of Jerusalem (apostrophized so touchingly) drew nearer, and from among them St. Veronica stepped forward, and, with her handkerchief, wiped the face of the dying man. Nothing could have been easier than to have counterfeited the legendary miracle, and for another cloth to have been substituted, bearing an impression of the features of Jesus. But with that spirit of verity and natural sense which so remarkably characterizes this Passion Play, the blank handkerchief was held forward as if in contradiction to a fable unheard of before the middle ages. Meanwhile we noticed an odd foreign-looking man with a basket in his hand, who came down the central street gazing about him like a stranger. On reaching the corner he stood transfixed with wonder at the sight before him. This, of course, was Simon of Cyrene; and, without much ceremony, the soldiers first desired, and then compelled him to carry the Cross. Again

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the procession moved forward amid the wailing of women and the noises of the excited mob.

Breathless anticipation crept over the audience, as we knew too well the painful sequel. Yet it was with an unexpected shock we recognised, as the chorus filed in one after another, that now they were all draped in black with silver crosses on the fillets round their heads, and that their manners were more grave and significant than ever. The choragus alone began the 16th *Vorstellung*, "Jesus am Kreuze"—Jesus on the Cross—in melodramatic recitative. Soft music accompanied him as he chanted on in mournful numbers, and anon we could detect the buzz of a great multitude behind the curtain—orders given, cries, and, above all, the terrible clang of hammers. By and by, the other voices joined in mellifluous chords long drawn out, like the wail of an æolian harp, swelling in delicious harmonies, and sinking away with a sigh of discord.

It was the crisis of the whole performance ; and expectation was so alert that I felt as in a nightmare, and would fain have pushed back

the curtain and have hurried on the solemn drama. There was no haste, however, in the Passion Play. Calmly the chorus chanted on to the last—calmly passed away. There was a pause of agonizing suspense. Then the curtain rolled up slowly, and before us we saw Golgotha.

Already the two thieves were upon their crosses, fixed on either side of the proscenium. A concourse of people was gathered at the back, and all eyes were fastened on the great Cross lying upon the ground in the midst, and on the pallid figure extended upon it. The executioners were preparing to hoist it up, and in a few moments it was set in its socket in front of all. The body was covered with a close-fitting flesh-colour web, and was girded with a linen cloth. The crown of thorns still surrounded the head. The face was soiled and blood-stained. The wounded hands and feet bled freshly. Of course we knew the actor could not be nailed to the wood: still the illusion was impenetrable, and every dreadful detail seemed complete. The heads of the

nails projected from hand and foot, and there was no other visible sign of support. This, I conceive, is a mistake in the arrangement, as, however much our eyes are accustomed to the common pictures of the crucifixion, it is evident at once, when you see a real body hanging so, that it could not remain in the position without additional support. Nevertheless, it was altogether wonderfully managed, and was a most affecting spectacle : but curiosity at this very clever deception mastered in me the emotion such a sight should call forth. I was told that many wept and some fainted as the scene proceeded. I must confess it did not move me in the slightest, although I acknowledge its marvellous truthfulness and power. For twenty minutes I watched with my opera glass to my eyes, and although I fancied, when the head dropped in the final agony, I could detect a strap behind the right shoulder, there was nothing to account for the suspension of the body ; and the method of operation remains to me a mystery. Mimic earthquake and thunder followed the last words,

"It is finished;" and the lurid sky overhead lent fresh strength to the theatrical effect. A youth came running in open mouthed with the tidings that the veil of the temple was rent in twain. Amazement and horror accumulated as the rumour spread around. Then Joseph of Arimathea appeared, bearing an official order from Pilate for the possession of the body of Christ. The executioners, having with a crow-bar broken the legs of the thieves, approached the central Cross for the like purpose. As they did so, Mary Magdalene sprang forward, and with expressive action implored them to spare the sacred form. The men drew back, and a soldier then advanced and thrust a spear into the left side, leaving a gaping wound, from which flowed blood and water.

Two ladders were now planted against the Cross, and men began to lower the body by means of a long linen cloth which had been passed round the chest, and beneath the arms, and so drawn up over the arms of the cross, from which the ends hung to the ground, where they were held by assistants. One by one the

nails were extracted with pincers from the wounded limbs, and the flaccid body sank forward into the grasp of the man on the front ladder, who bore it reverently to the ground. At the same instant, a sharp flash of lightning lit up the valley, and we were startled by a heavy peal of thunder, which set the seal of nature, as it were, upon the scene, and gave it for a moment the inimitable grandeur of reality.





CHAPTER V.

AND here, perhaps, the Play should have terminated, for as a work of art it had reached its limit. The succeeding scenes trenched on the supernatural, and, being beyond our experience, failed in dominating over our attention and emotions as those which had gone before. The author of the Passion Play, however, was doubtless guided by higher motives than mere artistic taste or practical knowledge, and I am inclined to believe he was right in all he did. Probably he judged the sufferings of our Lord included the term of sepulture, that mysterious period of Christ's descent into Hell, when (as St. Jerome hath it), he quenched the flaming sword of Paradise ; and when (as we read in the apocryphal gospel of the Acts of Pontius

Pilate), "the Lord, holding Adam by the hand, delivered him to Michael, the archangel; and he led them into Paradise filled with mercy and glory"—a subject which was a favourite with the writers of the old miracle-plays, and formed an appropriate pendant to the early *tableau* of the Fall. I myself think it not improbable that in the original draft of the play this formed a part, but when, under the title of "Ye harrowinge of Helle," this of itself became a popular Whitsun mystery, it may have been allowed to drop out of the *Passions Spiel*. In a didactic light as well as in poetical justice the Resurrection should follow the crucifixion, otherwise both preaching and faith were vain, nor would there be any illustration of Christ's divine nature: and, as an antithesis to the crucifixion, the Ascension would naturally be drawn in to shed a glory like that of sunset over the close. Thus, when we regard this drama as an exemplification of the fundamental doctrine of the Atonement, we find the author had reason in discarding a mere artistic termination, and in carrying on the edifying

spectacle, regardless of deterioration, to its just conclusion.

The 17th *Vorstellung*, "Die Auferstehung"—The Resurrection, opened with a charming invocation by the chorus, who, like a border of gay flowers, extended across the stage and sang the praise of our Redeemer. As they came on, heavy drops of rain began to patter down, scattering the audience in the open seats, who commenced beating a retreat at the first thunder-clap. For about five minutes it poured, but the chorus stood their ground without showing that they noticed the storm. Then they divided, to disclose a *tableau* of Jonah on the sea shore, and they gradually retired till they were beneath the shelter of the balconies. A tempest-tost ship was visible riding on the distant waves. The prophet had just been cast forth by the whale, and the sea-monster was partly covered by the waters. The sign given to the Pharisees and Sadducees had yet to be fulfilled, as likewise Christ's triumph over the powers of darkness, which was typified in the second *tableau*, in which the host of Pharaoh were seen

overwhelmed by the returning tide of the Red sea. The rain had by this time ceased; a refreshing coolness spread around; the sun burst out brightly behind a broken rack of clouds. With triumphant strains the chorus celebrated the ultimate conquest of good over evil, and they departed for a space, to appear but once again.

On the curtain rising, we beheld the sepulchre guarded by Roman soldiers. An angel came and rolled back the stone from the entrance, frightening the keepers, who fled. Then, heralded by an earthquake, the form of Jesus, clad in glittering drapery, and holding a banner in his hand, rose from the tomb and passed away out of sight. Mary Magdalene and the other women were seen approaching with spices and linen, but to their distress, they found the sepulchre empty. Afterwards the guards returned with the Pharisees, who bribed them to declare the body had been stolen while they slept. As they left together Mary Magdalene came back alone, and hovered about in uncertainty and

disquietude. Whilst she was bewailing the extraordinary event, we saw the form of Jesus, in his usual dress, standing near the side-scenes, with his face turned from her. Presently she looked up, and, supposing him to be the gardener, she called eagerly to him, asking if he could tell her who had removed the body. With incomparable dignity he turned and pronounced her name. She at once sprang forward and fell upon her knees with a sharp cry of astonishment and gladness, and clung to his hand, which she covered with kisses. For a moment they rested thus, her long hair falling in a stream of gold over his arm. Then with a quick gesture, he drew back, and Mary remained gazing up at him, pushing her beautiful hair from her face with her hands, an expression of mingled awe and devotion upon her countenance. In solemn tones he spoke the few words recorded in the gospel, and left her kneeling as the curtain fell. This scene was, perhaps, slightly over-acted, but it was one of the most touching and picturesque in the entire Play.

For the last time the inimitable chorus entered, and sang triumphantly, "Hallelujah," while the curtain rising, displayed Christ ascending in glory. The thunder-clouds had now furled down behind the hills. The fir-woods were glistening in the slanting sunlight. In the meadows around we could hear the birds singing merrily. The air was filled with the delicious fragrance which follows a shower. The bright robes of the singers and their flowing hair streamed and waved like banners in the wind. We had passed from sorrow to joy—from death to life—from battle to victory—and the Passion Play had reached its end.

As the people were moving from their seats I read the last few lines of my *libretto*, and found them so appropriate that I translate them here :—"If we have now in Ober Ammergau fitly pondered over the sorrows of our Lord, then shall we carry home with us fresh courage to employ in life and deed. Then the sacred vow of the people of Ober Ammergau will have attained its end, namely, the religious edification of those Christian folk

present. Like the people at Calvary, let us smite our breasts and go in silence. What the poet once sang comes home to each of us"—

"In all its depth, in all its height,
Before thine eyes all Life I roll ;
So with the world's great Play in sight,
Should'st thou be richer in thy soul."

"Never again do I come here to see the Passion Play," said Grahame, stretching his limbs; "I am tired to death, and my back aches as if I had lumbago."

"Heavens! what a remark to make!" groaned Theodore, "As if anyone would come twice to see the Passion Play! You might as well say never again will I go to school, or never again will I be born. We have done it, and I am annihilated with fatigue."

"And I," I exclaimed, while Harrington yawned acquiescence.

We walked back to our lodgings in a state of utter collapse. A cup of coffee soon gave a favourable turn to our opinion, though we were still too much stunned, as it were, by the unprecedented and startling nature of what we

had experienced, and were still too close upon it to be able to take in its entire significance. As in a picture-gallery, one has to draw back until one reaches the proper point of view, and as a certain distance is necessary to see the full proportions of a mountain, so time was requisite for us to attain a just notion of the extraordinary merit of this unique performance.

"And yet," I observed, as we lingered over our coffee, "I feel it has been an event in my life, like one's first sight of the sea, like meeting with Tennyson's poems, like seeing Rachel the *tragédienne*, like looking upon death. It is a sensation."

"Like discovering you are in love," suggested Harrington, with a grimace.

"Like being presented at Court," chimed in Grahame.

"Like a Turkish bath," said Theodore.

And, of course, we all laughed, which was very irreverent and improper.

"It is like a great many other things," I said, "but it seems to me we can compare it to none without doing it injustice. Charles Kean's

Shakespearian revivals were miracles of histrionic display, the service at Cologne Cathedral is the perfection of choral worship, Ristori's declamation used to be a study in the art of elocution ; but to-day we have all this and more added to it. As a tragedy, I would not exchange the Passion Play even for 'Hamlet.' The one touches the head and heart, but the other touches the soul also. It is so incentive, too. It begets new ideas and new capabilities within one. I can now well understand it was from seeing such a mystery (one called 'Adam and Eve') that Milton, when a young man, in Italy, obtained his first conception of 'Paradise Lost.' "

"It is indeed quite epic in its proportions," retorted Harrington.

"Our present fatigue may be an excuse for sneering at its prodigious length," said Grahame ; "but even you, Harrington, must confess its wonderful beauty."

"Oh, yes ; and I'm very glad we have done it. You see it will supply one with dinner-talk all through the winter."

"To be sure," agreed Theodore, "and I shall make a point of explaining that my boots were blacked by one of the false witnesses, and that St. Veronica brought up my hot water."

It was a grand mistake to think of quitting Ober Ammergau that evening, but it had been so settled owing to a demur respecting the possibility of procuring a carriage on Monday.

We had decided upon taking on our old carriage and driver as far as Partenkirchen, a town about ten miles distant, thinking, as it was a good sized place, we should get better accommodation than where we were. Our host and hostess cheerfully acquiesced in this arrangement, although I had given them at first to understand we should stay over the Sunday night. Worthy guileless people, they were delighted to house us so that we should attend their Play, which is justly the pride of the village, but they knew nothing of the greed of common lodging-house keepers, and entered into our plans the same as if they had been made with an eye to their own special interest. Their bill was ridiculously small ; so, to recon-

cile it to our consciences, we presented them with a *douceur* on leaving. Our luggage was soon packed. The carriage was brought up to the door. The host and hostess were warm in their farewells, beaming with thankfulness and kindhearted interest, and bustling round the carriage to shake hands with each of us with a straightforward *naïveté* that was charming. The daughter had a flower for our buttonholes. Even the stout servant wench rushed out, all smiles at our largess, and, to the scandal of Theodore, cried, "*Ich küss Ihr Hand*"—and she did it!

In a few more minutes we found ourselves in the cavalcade of carriages, which blocked the street, and soon the village was left behind and we had bidden our last farewell to Ober Ammergau.

I was telling Grahame about the old Cornish interludes, Guary plays, as they were called, which used to be performed in the open fields at Easter and Whitsuntide (and, by the by, I understand a Cornish version of the Passion Play itself is among the MSS. in the Bodleian library at Oxford).

"It seems you know all about these mysteries," remarked Harrington. "Of course you get it out of MacColl's book, so you may as well open that at once and let us have a dose."

"Pray do. It may send me to sleep," said Theodore, nestling in his corner.

" 'It is a trite observation that the drama, both ancient and modern, had a religious origin,' " I began, and then tossed aside the book and proceeded from some notes I had made. "The earliest specimen of a scriptural drama now in existence is one written in Greek by a Jew called Ezekiel, and of this play only fragments remain. The subject is the Exodus, and it was composed upon the model of the old Greek drama. St. Chrysostom, Apollinarius, Bishop of Laodicea, and Gregory Nazianzen, Archbishop of Constantinople, were all dramatic authors of this kind, and their works, I have no doubt, had as great a run in their day as Robertson's comedies now. It is rather curious that the only one of St. Gregory Nazianzen's plays still extant is that of Christ's Passion. It

seems to have always been a very popular drama. In the 13th century, the Passion Play was regularly performed at Friuli and at Civita Vecchia, in Italy, by the priests of certain monasteries; and, as appears from this extract, in the year 1420, upon the entry of the kings of France and England into Paris, '*Le mystère de la Passion de notre Seigneur*, done to the life as the same is figured round the choir of Notre Dame, was performed in the street before the palace upon a scaffolding one hundred paces in length.' Apropos, Mr. MacColl mentions here that when the Passion Play was performed at Metz in 1437, the priest who personated our Lord nearly expired on the Cross, having been taken down in a state of insensibility. Now, Hone, in his '*Ancient Mysteries*,' mentions this circumstance, but states that it occurred at Veximiel, upon the 3rd of July, 1437, and that the priest's name was Dominus Nicolle, of Neufchatel, curate of St. Victor, of Metz. This representation of the play was peculiarly unfortunate, for Messire Jean de Nicey, who took the character of

Judas, 'was nearly dead while hanging, for his heart failed him, wherefore he was very quickly unhung and carried off.' As time went on, these sacred mysteries became profane in character and awoke a spirit of irreverence, which vented itself in sharp satires upon their monkish performers. In the 'Beehive of the Romish Church,' the author expresses grave doubts of the value of such performances. In his quaint language, he remarks—'Christ hath not done anie thing in his death and passion, but they do plaie and counterfeite the same after him, so trimlie and livelie, that no plaier nor juggler is able to doe it better.' And he proceeds 'In summe a man doeth often spende a pennie or two to see a play of Robin Hood, or a Morisse daunse, which were a greate deale better bestowed uppon these apische toies of these good priests, which counterfeite all these matters so handsomelie, that *it will do a man as much good to see them, as in frostie weather to goe naked.*' Indeed when we read of the irreverent manner in which some of these spectacles were conducted, we may well deem they were anything but edifying. Their time was

past, and they fell, with a hundred other fashions and follies, before the printing-press. When the people could read the New Testament for themselves, there was no further need of these mysteries. As an engine of the priesthood they were very powerful, but at the last we find they turned against their employers who were thus hoisted on their own petard. The moralities of the 16th century were principally directed against the vices of the clergy, and in England they were prohibited, by proclamation, in 1549, if not earlier. They lingered on, however, for another century; but died out extinguished by the spread of knowledge and of Protestantism. In 1474 a priest of Croydon in a sermon which he preached at St. Paul's Cross is reported to have said, 'We must root out printing or printing will root out us.' And the remark would have applied equally to the miracle plays as to the religious fraternities of the Romish church. Their day was gone by, and new modes of teaching with new teachers were at hand, and the world for once was waiting to receive them."



CHAPTER VI.

As we drove by the Calvary beyond the village we saw several hundred peasants resting upon the green sward below. Some were refreshing themselves from baskets of provisions ; one or two were kneeling in prayer ; others were clambering up to the cavern, and, among the rest, was one very old woman with a face hooked like that of a hawk, and hair like the silvery tresses of the wild clematis, who had probably made this pilgrimage eight or nine times before, and was now toiling up at great risk to pay her last homage to the shrine. Very picturesque were the groups we passed along the road. Women walking sedately with folded arms ; their high sealskin caps lending them increased stature, and their dark brocaded

skirts standing out stiffly, as robes of ceremony should : Girls with quaint headdresses composed of smart coloured kerchiefs, folded over their braided hair ; pretty looking girls wearing necklaces with broad silver clasps, glittering with garnet and amethyst ; a flower carried in their hand or stuck on one side of their embroidered bodices : Men with a dash of Ireland in the cut of their coats and hats, but more romantic and elegant than any Irishman ever looked at home or abroad : Little children skipping along beside their parents, chattering like starlings, and like starlings rushing off in a cloud to chase a butterfly, or to hunt a goat up the hillside. The stream ran all in one direction ; and, though there was, of course, immense diversity in the crowd, there was a general expression of satisfaction upon each countenance that was very remarkable.

Some there were on whose brows one would say the shadow of the Cross still rested ; and, with most, though there would be a smile and a word to an acquaintance in passing, there was a grave demeanour that argued well for the

influence of the *Passions Spiel*. Probably all these had walked from a distance early in the morning, and would have to trudge many a mile to their rustic homes. They looked contented, and like people who had fulfilled a duty. To have seen the Passion Play would probably prevent their feeling footsore, and for many a month to come the memory of the grand and touching spectacle we had witnessed would be food for happy thought on lonely mountain-sides and in primitive homesteads.

At Ettal there were more multitudes of visitors, drinking beer and buying rosaries and commemorative medals at the stalls by the roadside. A block of carriages filled the roads. We ran down the great hill, which was, I think, more fatiguing than climbing up.

Harrington thought otherwise. "This is jolly," he had cried, "let's have a race." In vain Theodore protested against the impropriety. Grahame and myself got one on each side of him. It was useless to shriek "Forbear!" Harrington was coming on behind like an avalanche, at the rate of six feet to a stride.

"*Hurlez avec les loups si vous ne voulez être mangé,*" I shouted, and we rushed down to the very bottom, where we had to wait a quarter-of-an-hour for our carriage and for our breath.

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourselves," said Theodore, who had been left somewhere about the middle of the descent, and now came on in the carriage.

"I am," I replied, penitently.

"It is a mercy there was no one to see us," remarked Grahame.

"It is a mercy there was a bottom to the hill," added Harrington.

Through the meadows floated the scent of new-made hay, and in the air was the tinkling sound of the bells worn by cattle. A tranquillizing stillness reigned around. Our carriage rolled gently along the level road. Our spirits calmed, and our conversation recurred to the marvellous presence of Joseph Mair, the spontaneousness and accuracy of the day's performance, and the spell under which we remained bound during the action of that magic Play.

"One of the most remarkable points about it," observed Grahame, "is its extraordinary Protestant bearing. It might have been arranged by an English divine of the last century, only there was none clever enough to have done it. In its scriptural purity it seems absolutely opposed to the doctrines of the church which produces it."

"True," I replied. "The Virgin Mary had no importance whatever given to her, and St. Peter's most prominent act was the denial of his Master, while the only saintly legend introduced was in contradiction of itself. It would be Puritan in its teaching except that it steers clear of all doctrinal and theological dispute, and, like Truth itself, holds up a mirror only to the New Testament."

"I should have preferred more of a mediæval tone given to the actors," said Theodore. "Someone has said the St. Peter and St. John are perpetually falling into '*stained glass attitudes*.' I, myself, looked in vain for the correct angle of neck and wrist as we see in illuminated MSS. and preraphaelite pictures."

“ Brummagem Popery ! ” said Harrington.

At Oberau we turned off to the right along the post-road towards Partenkirchen. Fine mountain heights rose before us, and the views became wilder and more picturesque every moment. The shades of evening deepened gradually, and stars began to glitter here and there through the translucent sky. A thin veil of gauzy mist lay across the meadows. We could but just discern the castle of Werdenfels, away upon our right, as we neared Partenkirchen, and it was dusk when we entered the town.

Partenkirchen was in a state of jubilee. The streets were thronged with the inhabitants, and the inns and public-houses overflowed. Every bed was bespoken, every apartment occupied, and each minute fresh vehicles came rumbling in to add to the commotion and to take from our chance of obtaining shelter. After an hour's hunt we lighted upon a couple of rooms, in which we deposited our luggage, and with which we were fain to be contented. At first we thought of taking our driver and

carriage on to Innsbruck, but as we could not get fresh horses before morning, and we found a diligence left for Mittenwald at four o'clock, we decided it was better to trust to that and merely to rest ourselves as best we could. I should have voted for retaining the carriage, but directly our driver found how we were situated he doubled his demand, and was at the same time rather insolent in his manner, so we paid him and got rid of him at once.

"And now," said Theodore, "I feel our troubles are about to begin. We are just like shipwrecked sailors among tribes of savages. You may read it all in Captain Cook's voyages."

"Would it not be better to call back the fellow, and let him take us on to night to the next town at any price?" urged Grahame.

"And lose all the scenery? No. Beside, I would rather walk it than encourage extortion."

"Do put your virtue in your pocket," pleaded Theodore.

I was obstinate. "It was absurd to come on here," I said. "I told you how it would be."

"People always say that," replied Grahame.

"What are we to do with ourselves?" demanded Theodore. "We have no sitting-room, and our apartment has no lock to its door."

"Let us feed," suggested Harrington, and we turned towards the hostelry in not the most amiable frame of mind.

The *salle à manger* of the Post presented a scene such as a Teniers might depict or a Dickens describe. A wide low room with long tables running at right angles. The closely packed seats filled with dingy and voracious human beings whose manners were mannerless, and whose jargon was incomprehensible to us. Peering through the smoky, steaming atmosphere, we saw some people rising, and, without ceremony, we pounced upon their places. Talk of progressive development of races through circumstantial influences, I could write a convincing treatise on the degradation of individuals, in here observing the effect of black handled knives and forks upon ourselves. In five minutes we were vulgarly hammering

on the table to attract the notice of a waiter, and Harrington proposed sitting in our shirt-sleeves, it was so hot! A Babel of tongues—an ant-hill in motion—the room was enough to deprive one of reason. What we should have descended to, but for Marie, I cannot say. And who was Marie? The very freshest and liveliest specimen of that peculiar quintessence of Tyrolese womanhood, the *kellnerin* or waitress of the inn. One's idea of a waitress is usually associated with pert vulgarity and slipshod inattention, seen flaunting in and out of the door of the commercial-room at a country hotel. But through the Tyrol and its neighbourhood the *kellnerin* is the person worth looking at, "a neat-handed Phillis," distinguished by a leathern satchel and huge bunch of keys at her side. The mistress of the house may be a slattern, but the *kellnerin* is sure to be a smart, active sprite of a girl who has a word and a look for every guest, and who calculates addition sums with the skill of a Bidder. Marie, the *kellnerin*, laughed at our bad German, and supplied us with words as well as wine, fried *renchen*, the most delicious roast kid, and an

apricot omelette that would not have disgraced a Parisian restaurant. All night long there was a stir in the streets of Partenkirchen. One minute, it was the watchman proclaiming the hour and calling upon us to pray to the Virgin ; the next, a merry party of wassailers were shouting out the chorus of some song as they reeled homewards. My sofa was apparently stuffed with fleas. Harrington on his side of the room snored profoundly. I could hear people moving about downstairs. There was little sleep to be had, and I got up repeatedly and leaned out of the window, listening to the roar of a waterfall on the hillside, or watching for the advent of dawn. At last I dozed, and was dreaming of the Passion Play, a strange medley of pictures and music revolving round an ideal of isolation and solitary grandeur, a kaleidoscope of sight and sound and emotion that endlessly changed and endlessly restored "the noble figure, the sad worn dignified face," of Joseph Mair. A knock came at the door, and I found it was time to get up. The church bell was going for early service, and two or three women already passed on down the street

to attend it. The good-natured people of the house had prepared coffee and bread and butter and boiled eggs, when we came downstairs, and the housewife had, I found, been busy half the night, baking fresh rolls for our consumption. This was one of many little kindnesses we received which money could not repay. If you treat them with frankness and courtesy the people of this district are singularly cheerful and devotedly obliging ; but fashionable grandeur and that proper apathy so common now in society would be lost upon these simple folks, who would probably take it for insolence, and resent the condescension. And herein, I believe, is one of the advantages of travel, that, like art, it is a platform upon which differences of station are for a time abolished. In a foreign land one continually has to communicate with people of different ranks, simply as a man, without respect to condition of life. Wealth and title, which are of such advantage in civilized parts, where

“ Not a man for being simply man
Hath any honour ; but honour for these honours
That are without him,”

are of no use where all accommodation within reach can be bought up for a few shillings, and where the mountaineers, knowing nothing of superior society, are unable to appreciate it.

Our companions in the *eilwagen* were three Germans, the most gloomy and misanthropical, I should hope, of their race, since they never spoke to us or to one another the entire day, but only grunted monosyllables at intervals, and spent their time in slumber or in the perusal of Bædeker's guide-book. To admire the splendid scenery through which we passed never seemed to enter their heads. Two of them, I fancy, were brothers, stout, square-faced, middle-aged men of substance, evidently bound upon the tour of the Tyrol; the third was a kind of Eugene Aram pursued by the remorse of crime. With our perpetual gossip and observation, we must, I fear, have been a terrible worry to them; and this, perhaps, deepened the sense of misery they appeared to indulge in. The road was eminently picturesque. Fine slopes of fir-clad hills, backed by snowy peaks, rose on either hand. Twelve miles

beyond Partenkirchen we stopped at Mittenwald, a curious old village with fresco-painted houses. We then crossed the Isar, whose rapid waters we had last seen at Munich, and entering the Tyrol at Scharnitz, began the ascent of the Seefeld pass.

Magnificent rocks, peaks, and glaciers, wooded dingles and boisterous mountain torrents, reminded us of Switzerland. Along the road (a great part of which we walked) alcoves, containing Calvaries or the effigy of some saint, were erected here and there, and sometimes a cross commemorating an accident or a murder. A variety of pretty wild flowers grew upon the banks. The few villages we passed were pleasantly situated, the dwelling-houses were built with projecting eaves, and stone-weighted roofs, and wooden balconies with exterior staircases; and the better sort, as well as the churches, were covered with rudely designed frescoes of religious subjects. The inhabitants mostly looked poor and common-place. At length we reached the highest point of the pass, the site of a strong fortress, dismantled.

in 1805, whence we obtained a splendid panorama of the valley of the Inn, stretching for leagues before us. The river runs here between precipitous and barren mountains with snowdrifts extending down their sides. The descent to Zirl is by a steep winding road, passing the castle of Fragenstein, the ancient hunting lodge of the Emperor Maximilian, and commanding a series of glorious views, including the Sollstein and the Stubay glaciers. Zirl itself was, without exception, the poorest town I ever entered. It was very picturesque. Every house might have made the subject of an artist's sketch, and yet there was nothing to see, nothing to do but wait as patiently as we could for another *eilwagen*. Not a carriage was to be had at the Golden Lion, and it was too hot to walk. We seated ourselves in the inn-yard, out of the sun, and eat wild cherries, and drank some very objectionable wine, which was the only refreshment procurable.

"This is a dreadfully stupid place!" I exclaimed.

"If you can't find something *curious* in it,

it *really* must be," replied Harrington, joking. "I am always amused at the wonderful discoveries you are perpetually making on the road.—Is not that a splendid weed growing in the corner there? What can be finer than that stone wall opposite to us!"

"I can well afford to bear your jests," I said. "It is a philosophic source of happiness to be able to draw enjoyment from trifles."

"The more so," said Grahame, "since it does not prevent your admiring what even Harrington admires."

"I never knew Harrington admire anything except that girl in blue on board the Rhine boat," observed Theodore, seriously.

"Nor did I!" replied his brother.

A carriage drove by at the moment, and in it were our travelling friends returning to Innsbruck. There was a waving of parasols and hats and hands in greeting. Then the *fahrpост* drove up, and we got in and followed on to Innsbruck. From Zirl the road is comparatively level, descending merely with the river which it closely skirts. The stream is

broad and remarkably rapid, and the cliffs on the road side rise perpendicularly to a prodigious height. It was from one of these—Martinswand—that the Emperor Maximilian is said to have hung suspended by his feet, having slipped while following a chamois on the heights. Though seen from below no aid could be given till he was accidentally discovered and rescued by an outlaw, who, of course, received his pardon. From the road we could perceive the cavern and crucifix which mark the spot.

Innsbruck lay before us, a quiet but most beautiful city, surrounded by grand snow-clad mountains and full of much to interest the tourist. Here, at the Oesterreichischer Hof, we spent three or four delightful days. And here I must take leave of my readers.

Now the rest of the acts of myself and my three companions, and all that we did, and our crossing the Brenner into Italy, and our wanderings among the dolomite mountains, and our romantic adventures in the Ampezzo, and the story of a Venetian countess, and a painful



